Jan Bransen

The Antinomy of Thought

Maimonian Skepticism and the Relation between Thoughts and Objects

THE ANTINOMY OF THOUGHT

Nijhoff International Philosophy Series

VOLUME 43

The titles published in this series are listed at the end of this volume.

Jan Bransen
University of Utrecht,
The Netherlands

The Antinomy of Thought

Maimonian Skepticism and the Relation between Thoughts and Objects

KLUWER ACADEMIC PUBLISHERS
DORDRECHT / BOSTON / LONDON

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bransen, Jan, 1958-
The antinomy of thought : Maimonian skepticism and the relation between thoughts and objects / Jan Bransen.
p. cm. -- (Nijhoff international philosophy series ; v. 43)
Revision of thesis (doctoral)--University of Utrecht.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-7923-1383-6 (alk. paper)
1. Maimon, Salomon, 1754-1800. 2. Kant, Immanuel, 1724-1804--Contributions in theory of knowledge. 3. Skepticism. 4. Belief and doubt. 5. Philosophy, American--20th century. I. Title. II. Series.
B3068.B73 1991
149'.73--dc20 91-26550

ISBN 0-7923-1383-6

Published by Kluwer Academic Publishers,
P.O. Box 17, 3300 AA Dordrecht, The Netherlands.

Kluwer Academic Publishers incorporates
the publishing programmes of
D. Reidel, Martinus Nijhoff, Dr W. Junk and MTP Press.

Sold and distributed in the U.S.A. and Canada
by Kluwer Academic Publishers,
101 Philip Drive, Norwell, MA 02061, U.S.A.

In all other countries, sold and distributed
by Kluwer Academic Publishers Group,
P.O. Box 322, 3300 AH Dordrecht, The Netherlands.

Printed on acid-free paper

Printed in the Netherlands

CONTENTS

PREFACE

Being my dissertation this used to be my life's work. Kluwer now turns it into a book; my first book, but still just one book among the millions. The shift of perspective is thrilling. They used to fill my room, these pages, but now they spread the world in an almost infinite dilution. It makes me think of this book from the outside, and it makes me aware of the fact that any reader will need good reasons to look for this particular book. These reasons should concern the way in which the book is related to what is going on right now in philosophy (whatever that is supposed to mean). It is in order to provide some of these reasons that I wrote this preface.[1]

There are often objects involved in our activities. We need food in order to eat, a ball in order to play football, a tune to make music, someone to make love to, and so we need objects as well in order to *think of* or *about* them. These objects are involved in many different ways, but in each case it makes sense to ask what we *do* with these objects if they are involved in our activities. Most of the time the answer is easy – we *swallow* the things we eat, we *kick* the ball with our feet in playing football, we *realize* the tune in making music, and in

[1] Unlike the preface to the original dissertation this one is not going to be filled with the names of people I wish to express my gratitude to. Nevertheless I have to mention the names of two people right here, because I owe it to their continued interest in my work that this book turned out to be about Salomon Maimon's relevance to contemporary philosophy, and about the *Antinomy of Thought* – expressing the idea that it is because of our finitude that our understanding of thinking consists in understanding why the structure of our articulations of the relation between thoughts and objects has an aporetic character. These people are dr. Wayne Hudson and prof. dr. Cornelis van Peursen.

our recently liberated culture it is assumed that we *can do all kinds of things* with our beloved in order to make love.

With respect to thinking, however, the answer is not that easy. It isn't very clear what we *do with* an object in thinking of it. And the aim of this book is to explain why this isn't very clear. As a consequence the book does not contain any attempt to provide an answer – although some answers will be discussed, they are not the real subject-matter of this study. All attention is directed at the problem as such and it will be argued that it isn't possible at all to give a comprehensive account of thinking conceived of as an activity which involves objects.

Given such a general subject-matter and such a general aim, the reader might be surprised about the apparently extremely narrow and specific strategy the book follows. For it is indeed true that the book is filled with arguments that focus upon the work of just a small number of philosophers, and it is indeed not self-evident how such an explicit attention to such particular views might help to make such a general point. This generality is however a function of the exemplariness of the views discussed, and this has everything to do with the dominance of a Kantian-flavored conception of thinking in our recent philosophical past. Let me explain this.

Assuming that thinking is in one way or another a matter of forming judgements, or more carefully, assuming that episodes of thinking find in one way or another their proper expression in judgements, it seems appropriate to hold that what we *do* with objects in thinking of them is that we *determine* them. That is, in forming a judgement about something (assuming the traditional view that judgements typically display a subject-predicate structure), we determine the way in which the thing is what it is, i.e. we assign a predicate to a subject. We think, for example, that the colour of the chair I am sitting on is anthracite, and what we *do with* the object involved in our thinking (the colour of my chair) is that we *determine* it (it *is* anthracite).

As the designation of an activity, however, the verb 'to determine' is ambiguous in a crucial way. On the one hand it can mean that in determining the colour of this chair as being anthracite we *lay bare* what colour this chair is supposed to have independently of our judgements about it. Our thinking is as it were a matter of *discovering* the nature of

the reality we happen to find ourselves confronted with. But on the other hand 'determining' can mean that we *lay down* what colour this chair is supposed to have in terms of what colour-judgements we can make about it. Our thinking is as it were a matter of *deciding on* the way in which to conceive of the reality we deal with.

Concerning the relation between our thoughts and the objects they are about, this ambiguity of 'determining' implies an enormous difference in the direction of dependency – a difference Kant wrote about in the introduction to the second edition of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*[2]. Either our thoughts are dependent upon the objects they are about in such a way that our judgements should adjust themselves to the nature of the objects we happen to find, or the objects that make up our world are dependent upon our thoughts in such a way that their characteristics should adjust themselves to the categories we use in our judgements. Kant's famous *Copernican revolution* might in this sense be understood as an attempt to reinterpret the meaning of 'determining' as the kind of thing we *do with* objects in thinking of them. Instead of taking 'determining' to mean 'discovering' or 'laying bare' and running into the problems of a rationalist or empiricist metaphysics, Kant might be said to have argued that we better take 'determining' to mean 'deciding on' or 'laying down' and transform the problem of experience in such a way that it can be solved by means of a transcendental philosophy.

The general assumption behind the strategy I follow in this book is that much recent philosophy is Kantian in the sense that it is often taken for granted that there is an enormous and self-evident difference between an interpretation of thinking (i.e. 'determining reality') in terms of *finding a meaningful world* and an interpretation in terms of *making the world meaningful*. And the general aim of this book is to show that any account of thinking will turn out to have an intrinsically aporetic character because of the need *and* the impossibility to do justice to both interpretations – because, to put it this way, of the ambiguity of the verb 'to determine' itself.

Given the assumption of this Kantian character of much recent philosophy, the strategy followed in this book is quite straightforward. In

---

[2] *KdrV*, B XVI-XVIII.

the first part I argue that the Kantian assumption that there is an enormous and self-evident difference between *making* and *finding* generates difficulties for a number of leading American philosophers. Paying attention to the views of Rosenberg, Rorty and Nagel in this first part is a move which can partly be explained from a sociological point of view. I join a tradition with which I am acquainted; a tradition which spreads its influence and tends to take on global dimensions; a tradition however in which the voice of skepticism so far did not show up well. Therefore I present in the second part of this book an interpretation and defence of Salomon Maimon's skepticism, which is at once both a critique of the Kantian assumption and an analysis of the intrinsically aporetic character of our accounts of thinking in terms of the *Antinomy of Thought*.

Although it is a consequence of my strategy that the book seems to be about the views of a number of philosophers, it is really about a number of ideas which are not intrinsically related to the philosophers who have put them forward. This does not mean that I don't want to be loyal to them, sincere or grateful, but it only means that I don't want to defend claims about their views. These are not my subject-matter. And perhaps the best way to indicate what I mean is to focus on the way in which I turn the philosopher Kant in this book into a mere onlooker, even though a number of Kantian ideas play the leading part. After all, what I just called a Kantian assumption was probably not as such *defended* by Kant. One does not ordinarily defend one's assumptions. And it is a difficult question whether Kant *introduced* anything like this assumption. Even more difficult and already very complex is the question whether this assumption was part of Kant's philosophical legacy. For what exactly is *left* by a philosopher? All this, however, does not imply that the idea that there is an enormous and self-evident difference between interpretations of thinking in terms of *finding* and *making* does not exist. Nor does it imply that this idea was never assumed at all by Kant, nor that it never occurred to those who read or heard about Kant's writings, nor even that no-one has ever implicitly or explicitly ascribed it to Kant.

But whether or not the idea was held by or ascribed to Kant and/or his followers, does not improve or weaken the correctness of the idea.

An idea is not changed, defended or put into doubt by being the idea of someone. All that matters to an idea is *what* it is held to be. And it is only there where the philosophers come in. Not because they have good or bad ideas, but because they produce good or bad articulations of ideas. And it is there where *Salomon Maimon* comes in, for, as far as the ambitions of this book are concerned, I am convinced that I have succeeded at least in showing the originality, the strength and the importance for contemporary philosophy of the arguments Maimon developed with respect to the Kantian problematic. Notwithstanding Maimon's inaccessible style of writing I think this ambition was easiest to fulfill, because his arguments just happen to be original, strong and important.[3]

The fundamental idea put forward by Salomon Maimon is the idea of the *Antinomy of Thought*. It is, together with his so-called *Principle of Determinability*, at the core of his skeptical philosophy. Chapters Four and Five are devoted to it – it would be futile to attempt to say anything more about it here. But I will say something more about Maimon's kind of skepticism, and about the need to defend it right now at the close of the twentieth century.

There are three related reasons why Maimonian skepticism is more than just another version of the uninteresting kind of self-refuting skepticism modern philosophy is tired of taking seriously. First, it is not a collection of arguments designed to put whatever kind of positive knowledge-claim into doubt. It is directed against only one dogmatic claim: the claim that *thought and reality are commensurable*. This does not mean that one has to defend the *incommensurability* of thought and reality in order to be able to defend Maimonian skepticism. No, Maimonian skepticism is the attempt to preserve the modesty that *we just don't know* whether thought and reality are commensurable or

---

[3] Studying the writings of Salomon Maimon is a good way of discovering the obvious as well as problematical distinction between the linguistic, 'textual' formulation of an idea and its mental, intelligible articulation (or should I say articulatability). Page after page one realizes that although Maimon gets almost all words wrong, he gets the ideas right. This is a troubling experience for an analytically minded philosopher who tends to agree with John Searle's simple maxim that if you can't say it clearly you don't understand it yourself. The excuse that Maimon had to learn himself the German language (see below, pp. 56-57) does of course not remove all amazement.

not. It argues that any account of the relation between thoughts and objects will lead to the *Antinomy of Thought*. This means that any account of the relation between thoughts and objects will have an intrinsically aporetic character without it being possible for us to know whether the aporetic involved is a matter of the relation between thoughts and objects itself or just a contradiction *in* or *of* the account, because it is not possible for us to distinguish between the account and that what the account is supposed to be about. As such a Maimonian position is typically a skeptical position, sustaining doubt. But it is not just a negative position: it aims to increase our understanding ourselves.

That is the second reason why Maimonian skepticism is different. It argues that we should resist the temptation to solve the problem involved in our accounts of thinking. All we should do is to understand why our attempts to account for the relation between thoughts and objects lead to the *Antinomy of Thought*. And if we do understand that we still don't understand something of *thinking itself*, but only of *our accounts of thinking*, namely, why they take the form of a *problem*. That is the most important feature of Maimonian skepticism, that it provides arguments for the apparently counterintuitive conclusion that it is possible to understand something by understanding why it is and will remain a problem. Or, in other words, Maimonian skepticism is the position which argues that it is possible for an adequate account of our human condition to take the form of a problem. Understanding the finitude of our minds does not, according to such a position, mean to have a *theory* which explains the possibility and the actuality of our minds being finite, but does mean to be able to account for the *problem of experience* we are confronted with.

This gives us our third reason why Maimonian skepticism is an interesting and important kind of skepticism: it gives us arguments to believe that sometimes we can increase our understanding more by appreciating a problem for what it is (namely, a problem) than by attempting to develop a theory in order to eliminate the problem. This is, of course, a strange reason, given the philosophical tradition of our theoretically oriented culture. But it is all the more *the* reason why I think it is important to defend such a Maimonian kind of skepticism at this moment.

This reason relates to topics not dealt with in the main parts of this book; topics hinted at in the Postscript which is about a change of attitude called irony, and which might be of concern to the contemporary debate on the self-image of philosophy. I must confess, however, that I wasn't able to make much of this theme – apart from the suggestion that the arguments developed in the main parts of the book and reflected upon in the Postscript do strongly favour the impression that philosophy is in an important sense concerned with the *conservation* of problems *as problems* rather than with their dissolution in theories. Of course, a mere suggestion is not much, but perhaps it is better not to discuss such large issues as the self-image of philosophy in the postmodern era. Perhaps the only sensible thing to do right now is to show what philosophical arguments would be like if one succeeds in combining skepticism with optimism. That is what I hope to have done in this book.

Utrecht
July 1991

Jan Bransen

INTRODUCTION

This study is about the currently much neglected aporetic character of our accounts of the relation between thoughts and objects, which stems, as I will argue, from the need to do justice to two different ways in which judgements might be thought to be informative about the objects they apply to. On the one hand we have to take into account that judgements might be said to specify a location within a conceptual framework, a location that is occupied by the objects the judgements are about. This means that judgements might be informative about the objects they apply to only because they define the relations between the concepts that make up the conceptual framework within which our thinking of reality takes place. On the other hand however, we have to take into account that judgements might be said to specify the properties of objects in such a way that the judgements are informative about those objects because they reveal real features of them. Thus, in judging that the chair I sit on is a typical twentieth century wheeled office chair with all kinds of moving parts, and that its colour is anthracite, I on the one hand seem to specify a number of conceptual distinctions that function within my conceptual framework in such a way that it allows me to classify an object, and on the other hand I seem to specify some of the real properties of a particular object upon which I happen to sit at this very moment. For matters of convenience I propose the following slogans as labels for these different ways in which judgements might be thought to be informative about the objects they apply to:

1. By means of judgements we *make* the world meaningful.
2. By means of judgements we *find* a meaningful world.[1]

My claim in this study is two-fold. I will argue (a) that it is impossible for us to understand the act of judging in terms of only one of the distinct ways in which judgements can be informative; and (b) that it is impossible for us to understand how these distinct ways could be combined in one account of the relation between thoughts and objects. Hence the intrinsically aporetic character of any account of thinking.

Standing in the tradition which seeks to combine European transcendental philosophy with Anglo-American analytical philosophy, I shall develop my argument in two steps. In Part One I criticise a number of leading American philosophers, arguing that even though their views differ in important ways, they all run into difficulties because of their common underestimation of the tension between the functions of *making* and *finding* in their accounts of thinking. The point of this part is to show (1) the importance of a distinction between *making* and *finding* as elements of an account of thinking, and (2) the aporetic character of accounts of thinking that try to do justice to both elements. In Part Two I present a detailed reconstruction of the *Antinomy of Thought*, which is a central theme in the philosophy of *Salomon Maimon* (1752-1800)[2], a neglected early critic of Kant. The point of this reconstruction consists in the fact that Maimon provides the material for a powerful argument in favour of the claim that the tension between *making* and *finding* reflects the intrinsically aporetic character of the structure of our articulations of the relation between thoughts and objects. This argument leads to the conclusion that an account of thinking should not be an attempt to *solve* the tension between *making*

[1] The difference in word order is not accidental. The position of 'meaningful' with respect to 'world' differs in order to stress that in the first case it becomes an attribute of the world whereas it already is an attribute of the world in the second case. The use of different articles is needed because the indefinite article would be too indefinite in the first case (as if we are involved with just a world among many others), whereas the definite article would be too definite in the second case (as if it is already known that there is this one meaningful world).

[2] The exact year of Maimon's birth is unknown. It is generally assumed to be 1754 or 1753, but Samuel Atlas argues that it has to be as early as 1752 (or possibly even 1751). See Samuel Atlas, *From Critical to Speculative Idealism* (The Hague, 1964), p. 3.

and *finding*, but, more modestly, an attempt to *understand* it. To put it differently, understanding the relation between thoughts and objects means to understand *why* any account of it will have an aporetic character, i.e. *why* understanding the relation between thoughts and objects will remain a *problem*.

In the Postscript I make a few remarks on the relevance of irony[3] in order to estimate my apparently paradoxical conclusion.

[3] In a sense reminiscent of the romantic irony as developed by Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829).

PART ONE

FINDING AND MAKING

ACCOUNTS OF THOUGHT IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY

"Perhaps it is only with respect to philosophical issues that *making* them and *finding* them mean the same."

Jan Bransen,
The Antinomy of Thought,
(Dordrecht, 1991), p. 5.

INTRODUCTION

This part consists of three short chapters on the work of Jay F. Rosenberg, Richard Rorty and Thomas Nagel. The point of these chapters is two-fold. On the one hand they will function as an extension of the introduction, since I hope to explain more fully what I mean by the aporetic character of our accounts of the relation between thoughts and objects, by means of a critique of the work of these American philosophers. On the other hand these chapters have an important function in the argument of this study as a whole as well. For I will argue that it is just because of Rosenberg's, Rorty's and Nagel's tendency to underestimate the importance of the tension between the functions of *finding* and *making* in their accounts of thinking, that the structure of these accounts reveals its aporetic character.

The arguments I will use in the following chapters are designed to meet the specific claims of the philosophers I discuss. Their point however, is not that particular. I chose to criticize the views of these American philosophers because of their paradigmatic bearing. Thus, I am interested in Rosenberg because he argues for one of the logically available options — i.e. the view that thinking conceived of as *finding* a meaningful world will turn out to be analytically equivalent to thinking conceived of as *making* the world meaningful, at least if we understand this latter one as governed by scientific procedures. Likewise, I am interested in Rorty because he argues for another radical option — i.e. the view that accounts of thinking in terms of *finding* have nothing to do with accounts of thinking in terms of *making*. The failure of modern philosophy shows the vacuity of the former conception, and Rorty's plea for a post-Philosophical culture is meant to convince us of the fact that a conception of thinking in terms of *making* the world meaningful is powerful enough to sustain all our ideas about the relation between

thoughts and objects. Finally, Nagel's work is of great importance too, because he is one of the few contemporary philosophers who is aware of the aporetic character of accounts of thinking, even though he unwarrantably assumes that it is not a matter of our *accounts* of thinking, but of the problematic nature of the relation between thoughts and objects itself.

CHAPTER ONE

ROSENBERG:

SCIENCE AS THE MAKING OF FINDING

In *One World and Our Knowledge of It*[1] Rosenberg develops a version of scientific realism that might be summed up by the following three theses:

1. We must understand our experiences necessarily as experiences of a world of things, existing independent of us and having spatio-temporal relations with one another and with us.
2. The only way our representations of this world can be correct or incorrect is by thinking them consilient with or in conflict with the representations of others, thus giving rise to the idea of a communal conceptual scheme.
3. We must comprehend changes in and of our conceptual scheme as converging towards an absolutely correct conceptual scheme.[2]

---

[1] Jay F. Rosenberg, *One World and Our Knowledge of It* (Dordrecht, 1980)

[2] The structure of *One World and Our Knowledge of It* is much more complicated, but see Rosenberg's *The Thinking Self*, pp. 8-9, in which Rosenberg gives a short tripartite outline of his former study exactly along these lines.

Rethinking the arguments of Kant and Strawson (as regards the first thesis), Wittgenstein (the second thesis) and Peirce (the third), Rosenberg develops an account of thinking as "the building up through time of a comprehensive, coherent, unitary, and determinate world-picture".[3] This account rests upon an argument to the effect that *finding* a meaningful world comes down to *making* the world meaningful. The origin of this argument lies, according to Rosenberg, in Kant's 'Copernican revolution'. The best way to present it is to take a very precise look at the following sequences of bi-conditionals:

I	(1)	A representation is justified if and only if it is correct.
	(2)	A representation is correct if and only if it is adequate to the world.
II	(3)	A representation is adequate to the world if and only if it is correct.
	(4)	A representation is correct if and only if it is justified.[4]

The first sequence of bi-conditionals can function in an argument to the effect that some of our representations are justified because they are adequate to the world. Such an argument needs of course one more premiss, namely *that* a given representation *is* adequate to the world. This extra premiss however, is never forthcoming, as Rosenberg points out, using both Sellars' attack on the "Myth of the Given" and Wittgenstein's "Private Language Argument" in his refutation of a hypothetical "Criteriological Realist".[5] This refutation does not, according to Rosenberg, entail a refutation of the bi-conditionals under consideration. Therefore it remains possible, precisely indeed because they are *bi*-conditionals, to reverse their order and use the second sequence in another argument. According to Rosenberg, this is what is at stake in

---

[3] *One World and Our Knowledge of It*, p. 127.
[4] ibid. pp. 110-117.
[5] Ibid. pp 87-108.

Kant's 'Copernican revolution'. Thus, together with the "Criteriological Realist" and also with the "Transcendental Idealist", Rosenberg accepts identity-relations holding between (1) a justified representation, (2) a correct representation, and (3) a representation that is adequate to the world. He accepts these identities because he needs the second sequence of bi-conditionals to secure his position as a "Constitutive Realist". The claim of such a realist is that we can determine the adequacy to the world of our representations, because we can use the second sequence of bi-conditionals in an argument together with an extra premiss which states that certain representations are indeed justified. Rosenberg's notion of justification here is a *communal* one: because we can engage in a communal practice of justifying representations, we can obtain justified representations, hence correct ones (because of bi-conditional 4), hence representations that are adequate to the world (because of bi-conditional 3).[6]

Although it would be tempting to suggest that there is at most an identity of reference, but a difference of sense between (1) *justified* representations, (2) *correct* representations, and (3) representations that are *adequate to the world*, this is not what Rosenberg is asserting. He stresses that there is no real sense in which these different descriptions are different and claims that the bi-conditionals under consideration are *analytically* true:

> It is surely a necessary truth that an object is represented correctly *if and only if* it is (in itself) as it is represented as being (...) What and how things *are* (in themselves) is (analytically) what and how they are correctly represented as being.[7]
>
> Questions of existence (of what are ontological reals) just *are* questions of correctness.[8]
>
> ...the only way in which we *could* make sense of the notion of (absolute) correctness (...) is in terms of a diachronic convergence of representational systems *in the limit* which emerges from an invariant pattern of retrospective justi-

---

[6] ibid. pp. 158ff. It is precisely at this point of his argument that Rosenberg, most clearly, emphasizes his unwillingness to accept Kant's Transcendental Idealism. Justifications are, according to him, a matter of the community, not a matter of the a priori structure of our faculty of cognition. See particularly pp. 109-110.

[7] ibid. p. 110

[8] ibid. p. 113

fiabilities. (...) Absolute correctness is nothing but the diachronic limit of justification.[9]

These are bold claims, and I will argue (1) that they are false, and (2) that their untenability shows (a) the need to do justice to the distinction between aspects of *finding* and of *making* in accounts of thinking, and (b) the difficulty to combine these different aspects in one coherent account of the relation between thoughts and objects. That is, I will argue that it is precisely the breakdown of the bi-conditionals that marks both the failure of Rosenberg's position and the importance to take the tension between *finding* and *making* seriously.

In order to arrive at representations that are adequate to the world, Rosenberg needs an extra premiss which asserts that certain representations are justified. A justified representation, which is for Rosenberg the same as a *rational* representation[10], is according to him (the result of) an action that satisfies two conditions. Firstly, the action must fit with the beliefs of the agent; from the *inside*. If, for example, I form at this very moment the linguistic representation "I am word-processing", this representation certainly fits with my internal perspective on the way the world is. Just this however, is not enough to make this representation justified. After all, it might be the case that I am dreaming, hence, not *really* word-processing at all. My beliefs may be false, even though I, from the inside, cannot know that. But if my beliefs are false, and if my representing action fits these false beliefs, it surely cannot be a justified action. Therefore, and this is the second condition, in order to be justified, my representing action must fit as well with the way the world is seen from the *outside*. Rosenberg makes it clear that this second condition needs a careful formulation. It should not turn out to have the impossible consequence that an agent, in order to be rational (in order to form justified representations) must be able to determine what is the case independent of his beliefs (independent of his representations of what is the case). Finite intelligences like us clearly cannot do that. There is however, according to Rosenberg, a definite

---

[9] ibid. pp. 116-117
[10] ibid. p. 128; pp. 165ff.

sense in which it might intelligibly be said that rational agents possess not only an internal perspective but also an external one. Namely, in the sense that we can have a "we-perspective".[11]

Rosenberg argues that human beings do not only form individual or private representations, but always also do possess collective or *communal* representations; representations we can have individually only by forming them collectively.[12] These communal representations are accompanied by a 'collective apperception', a "we think that...". The 'we' of this collective apperception is constituted by the collective acceptance of these communal representations. This 'we' is, to use a phrase of Searle[13], both *caused by* the collective action and *realized in* the acting collective.[14] Because we can, individually, be rational agents only if we possess an external perspective, a "we-perspective", we must be members of a collective. And what is more, we must attach a greater normative force to our communal representations in order to be rational, i.e. in order to be able to form justified representations.[15] To put it differently, concordance between representation R and my individual or private beliefs is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for R's being justified, whereas concordance between R and my communal representations (the representations I have as a member of a collective, because we formed them collectively) is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for R's being justified.

The justification of particular representations, therefore, is a matter of *making* them fit in our set of communal representations, the set Rosenberg calls our 'conceptual scheme'. Of course, the argument so far did only succeed in removing the question of justifying representations one step. For, how are we to justify our conceptual scheme, or, how are we to justify the replacement of one conceptual scheme by another? This is a real problem, for whereas it is possible, at least according to Rosenberg, to adopt an external point of view with regard to

---

[11] ibid. p. 158
[12] ibid. p. 159
[13] In his *Intentionality* (Cambridge, 1983) Searle defends the view that "mental states are both *caused by* the operations of the brain and *realized in* the structure of the brain". p. 265
[14] See *One World and Our Knowledge of It*, pp. 159-164.
[15] ibid. p. 168.

particular representations (as we saw, the point of view of a community), this practice cannot work with regard to this communal conceptual scheme itself. After all, what kind of external point of view might that be, given our being finite? This problem presents itself, according to Rosenberg, in terms of the following dilemma: *either* what can count as a justified replacement of one conceptual scheme by another is defined in terms of the actual conceptual scheme, which implies that it can never be justified to accept a successor scheme, *or* what can count as a justified replacement is defined in terms of this successor conceptual scheme itself, which implies that the practice of justification is question-begging. Thus, either it can *never* be justified to replace a conceptual scheme by a new one, or it is *always* justified, in both cases independent of whatever content the conceptual schemes in question have, and consequently, independent of how reality will turn out to be.[16a]

Rosenberg argues that it is possible to escape from this dilemma, without having to claim that we can justify a conceptual scheme from outside our finitude. There are, he claims, circumstances that transcend any particular conceptual scheme, even though it remains possible for us to identify them because they do not transcend our existence as members of a rational community. Reference to these circumstances enables a community to replace their actual conceptual scheme by a successor scheme.[15] These circumstances have three characteristics. Firstly, there is an 'analytical truth' about rational communities:

> ...a rational community is collectively committed to the *policy* of adopting qualified successor schemes in the face of emerging (predecessor) anomalies as a condition of its existence as a rational community — of its being in the "logical space" of epistemic *appraisals* at all — and the legitimacy of replacing some specific representational system by some specific other (that is, of

---

[16a] Rosenberg refers to Rorty as defending the impossibility of justifying conceptual schemes, because of the first reason, and to Stroud, because of the second reason. ibid. pp. 172-173. See Rorty, "The World Well Lost" in *Journal of Philosophy*, 1972, and Stroud, "Transcendental Arguments and 'Epistemological Naturalism'" in *Philosophical Studies*, 1977

[15] *One World and Our Knowledge of It*, p. 179

some "paradigm shift") can be retrospectively secured as an analytical consequence of this necessary (collective) commitment.[16]

The other two characteristics are mentioned in the first sentence of this quotation: circumstances, reference to which may enable a community to justifiably replace their actual conceptual scheme by a successor scheme, must be circumstances in which (1) there is a conceptual scheme that *qualifies* as a *successor* scheme, and (2) there did emerge (predecessor) anomalies. Although Rosenberg's interpretation of the *successor*-relation between different conceptual schemes is quite interesting, I shall not go into it here.[17] Neither shall I go into Rosenberg's less cogent account of the emergence of anomalies.[18] My reason is, that these latter kinds of characteristics may, indeed, be necessary conditions for a justified *replacement* of one conceptual scheme by another, but not necessary conditions for the *having* of a conceptual scheme in the first place. Assuming that any collective has a perfectly rational history, Rosenberg might be right to think that at any point in time any collective has a justified conceptual scheme. For granted this assumption, any actual scheme will be the result of a, maybe infinite,

---

[16] ibid.

[17] Rosenberg argues that a successor scheme must be able to explain both the phenomena dealt with by the predecessor scheme (i.e. the content structured by the scheme), as *appearances* in terms of its own *real* phenomena, and the laws, assumed by the predecessor scheme (i.e. the way the scheme structured its content), as *apparent* laws, in terms of its own *real* ones. See, ibid. pp. 180-186. The argument that I will develop is independent of the cogency of this account of the successor-relations between conceptual schemes.

[18] ibid. p. 175-177. Rosenberg asserts that anomalous particular representations emerge as representational responses to non-representational stimuli (in that sense we *find ourselves* with experiences, since our diachronic world-picture evolves in the face of something that is not entirely up to us) in individual experiencers. Now there is a problem with the *communal* character of these anomalies, a character which they need in order to count as characterizations of the circumstances in which we are to justify our (communal) conceptual scheme, and not just one of our individual representations. The problem arises because, in order to make anomalies communal, we *should* collectively respond in the *same* way to the *same* stimuli. The 'should', however, is normative, and this is problematic, for it is not very clear whether Rosenberg can accept *natural* norms, precisely because he claims that all epistemic norms, norms governing the representational responses of individual experiencers, are *communal* norms. (pp. 168-169) But here the norms must be *natural*, because the only way to identify the situation in which the representational activities must collectively be the same, is to point to the non-representational (*natural*) stimulus.

series of replacements in circumstances which had the three required characteristics. But the assumption of a perfectly rational history is not obviously warranted with regard to any actual collective of human beings.

Without this assumption Rosenberg's argument becomes significantly implausible. For imagine the following situation. Walter Alvarez, a member of a collective of palaeontologists, has a collection of representations that might be sorted out in the following way: (1) a set of *communal* representations (the palaeontologists' conceptual scheme), (2) a set of private representations that *concord* with this conceptual scheme (for example, a set of judgements about the chemical composition of a specific number of fossils), and (3) a set of representations that do not concord with this conceptual scheme (for example, his beliefs about the extinction of dinosaurs as caused by the impact of a huge meteorite). Suppose, in addition, that Alvarez is rhetorically very talented, and succeeds in convincing all palaeontologists of the undeniability of (part of) the last set of representations. Consequently, the collective of palaeontologists now is confronted with anomalies. Suppose, finally, that they cannot think of a conceptual scheme that would qualify as a successor scheme; a situation that is not all too uncommon in scientific communities.

Well, what should a palaeontologist do? Does his "we-perspective" help him with regard to the anomalous representations? That is not very clear. It depends on whether the anomalous representations are treated as part of the set of communal representations. If they are so treated, then the palaeontologists' conceptual scheme as a whole is a set of beliefs that doesn't make sense of reality, because in that case it would be an incoherent set. This certainly is a possibility, but it is a possibility that doesn't help the members of the palaeontologists' community. Besides that, it makes Rosenberg's account of thinking ("the building up through time of a comprehensive, coherent, unitary, and determinate world-picture") vacuous: it will reduce our understanding of what it comes down to hold that science is 'the *making* of *finding*' to some empty advice as "Well, keep searching for a conceptual scheme that *can* qualify as a successor scheme!"

The other possibility is that the anomalous representations are *not* treated as part of the palaeontologists' conceptual scheme, i.e. the paleontologists keep believing what they already believed, and neglect, as long as necessary, what cannot fit in their communal conceptual scheme. This is a real possibility too, and it has the advantage that the palaeontologists remain in possession of a set of justified representations, and thereby, that they remain in possession of the extra premiss they need to complete Rosenberg's 'syllogism'[19]. Hence, they might be said to have a set of representations that are adequate to the world. In other words, if a palaeontologist acts in concordance with this second possibility, if he neglects his anomalous representations as long as he doesn't know of a conceptual scheme that qualifies as a successor scheme, then it remains possible to understand what it means to say (with Rosenberg) that a palaeontologist is able to think of reality.

This second possibility has, however, consequences that makes Rosenberg's account of what it means to think of reality untenable. The point is not that conservatism cannot be justified: granted the actual inexistence of a conceptual scheme that qualifies as a successor scheme, probably the best thing to do is to stick to your old beliefs. Nevertheless, if that is what a palaeontologist does, he cannot at the same time hold that his beliefs are *correct* if that is equivalent to their being *adequate to the world.* In other words, in the face of anomalies sequence II breaks down, because the *correctness* of representations cannot, in the face of anomalies, be *both* equivalent to their conservative justification *and* their enduring adequacy to the world. In terms of the separate bi-conditionals this means that in the face of anomalies they turn out to be nothing but ordinary implications.

This can easily be explained in terms of three different sets of representations. The first bi-conditional states that the set of justified representations is equivalent to the set of correct representations, and the second bi-conditional states that, in addition, this set of correct representations is equivalent to the set of representations that are adequate to the world. As regards the first equivalence, the case of the palaeontologists that I just sketched, now reveals that the set of *justified* represen-

[19] Rosenberg's term for the argument based on the second sequence of bi-conditionals. ibid. p. 117.

tations is not *necessarily* equivalent to the set of *correct* representations. Whereas it might be the case that every member of the set of correct representations is, by that very fact, also a member of the set of justified representations, it is not necessarily true that every member of the set of justified representations is a member of the set of correct representations. In other words, we might maintain that the set of correct representations is a *subset* of the set of justified representations; a *proper subset*, that is, for a justified representation does not *need* to be correct. It might just be a representation that we happen to have all along (and that we stick to in the face of anomalies when we do not know of a conceptual scheme that qualifies as a successor scheme). And we can only claim that such a representation *must* by that very fact be correct if and only if our factual history as a collective of rational agents was itself perfectly rational. But this assumption, as I noticed, is not very reliable. If all this is sound, then I think we must reformulate

(1) A representation is justified if and only if it is correct

as

(5) A representation is justified if and only if it is correct or the best we happen to have.

The difference between *'correct'* and *'the best we happen to have'* is crucial to the main line of my argument, because this difference reflects the difference between *finding* a meaningful world and *making* the world meaningful. After all, the best representation we happen to have might at best be understood as a representation that allows us to *make* the world meaningful, whereas the meaning of a correct representation, now that we separated it from its being justified, depends completely on its being adequate to the world, i.e. on the possibility to *find* a meaningful world.

Exactly the same effect results from a closer look at the second biconditional. I mean, there is good reason to think that the set of correct representations is not *necessarily* equivalent to the set of representations that are adequate to the world. This second line of criticism starts

from the very opposite as the first one: after having established that *making* the world meaningful is not necessarily identical to *finding* a meaningful world, I now want to show that *finding* a meaningful world is not necessarily identical to *making* the world meaningful. The starting-point of this criticism is Rosenberg's assertion that, finally, the idea of a rational history of conceptual scheme replacements only makes sense retrospectively, i.e. in terms of a convergence "across time to an *ideal* limit, a conceptual scheme which embodies an absolutely correct representation of the one real world".[20] Now this notion of an absolutely correct representation of the one real world contains a very interesting paradox. Granted that

(2) A representation is correct if and only if it is adequate to the world

we must assume that this final conceptual scheme presents the final set of representations that are adequate to the world. Yet this cannot be, because of the nature of a representation. A representation is necessarily bound to a point of view on the thing it is a representation of. It never can be the thing itself, for then it could not be a representation of it. Consequently, something can only be a representation of a thing if it implies the possibility of other representations of that same thing it is a representation of. It might be true of course, that these implied representations are accessible only from another point of view. Therefore, it is imaginable that relative to a specific point of view there is a limit to the series of replacements of representations. But to call the final set of representations we can reach from such a specific point of view absolutely correct, means to take them *not* as representations of the one real world, but as representations of a version[21] of the world. This implies that we must reformulate

(2) A representation is correct if and only if it is adequate to the world

---

[20] ibid. p. 185

[21] I borrow the notion of a "version of the world" from Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, (Indianapolis, 1978). See, especially, pp. 2-5, 17ff, 109ff.

as

(6) A representation is correct if and only if it is adequate to the world as conceived from a specific point of view.

The added qualification is of great importance to the main line of my argument, for it relates the equivalence between *correctness* and *adequacy to the world* to the particularity of a point of view. As such it points out that the connotations of *finding* and *making* do not only differ with respect to the practices of the thinking agent, but also with respect to the implied relations between thoughts and objects. This of course was only to be expected, granted that an account of thinking is mainly an account of the relation between thoughts and objects. The result of the added qualification is that the set of absolutely correct representations, as a finite set arrived at from a specific point of view, cannot be equivalent to the set of representations that are adequate to the world, since this latter set cannot be related to a specific point of view. So, if there is a sense in which we might coherently say that it is possible to *find* a meaningful world, this has to be a sense in which the emphasis should be on the indefinite article "a". The idea of an absolutely correct set of representations gives only meaning to the possibility of *finding* a *version* of the world. But, assuming the equivalency of this set of representations to the set of representations that are adequate to the world *as conceived from a specific point of view,* we will realize the difference made by the definite article "the" in the phrase "*making* the world meaningful". For, even if it is not possible for us to conceive the world from another point of view, this does not allow us to conclude that our point of view is just a neutral instrument with which we can make *the* world meaningful.[21a] We might of course think that the notion of inaccessible representations does not make sense[22], but then we cannot hold on to the intelligibility of the ideal limit of an absolutely correct representation of *the one real world*, as Rosenberg does.

[21a] See, in this respect, my treatment of Nagel's conception of realism. Chapter Three, section 1, below pp. 35-39.

[22] As Donald Davidson does. See his "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme", in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford, 1984), esp. pp. 185-195.

The point of my argument has been to challenge Rosenberg's claim that there are identity-relations holding between (1) a justified representation (2) a correct representation, and (3) a representation that is adequate to the world, in order to show that there is no analytical equivalence between *making* the world meaningful and *finding* a meaningful world. By disputing both alleged bi-conditionals, I made a case for (a) the need to do justice to the distinction between aspects of *finding* and of *making* in accounts of thinking, and (b) the difficulty to combine these different aspects in one coherent account of the relation between thoughts and objects. Since we need the plausibility of these two points in order to be aware of the aporetic character of accounts of the relation between thoughts and objects, it is obvious that Rosenberg is bound to underestimate this.

But Rosenberg is not the only contemporary philosopher who neglects the aporetic character of our accounts of thinking. Even Rorty, as I will argue in the next chapter, misses the importance of this aporetic, although he certainly is aware, in his critique of the Cartesian, Lockean and Kantian background of modern philosophy, of both (a) the need to do justice to the distinction between aspects of *finding* and of *making* in accounts of thinking, and (b) the difficulty to combine these different aspects in one coherent account of the relation between thoughts and objects.

CHAPTER TWO

RORTY:

BILDUNG WITHOUT MIRRORS — MAKING RATHER THAN FINDING

As early as 1972[1], Rorty expressed his aversion to the prominent place of the notion of 'the world' in philosophical accounts of thinking. According to him the notion of 'the world' is purely vacuous, and more of an obsession than an intuition.[2] We don't need it in order to be able to analyse the meaning of judgements. The "please don't care about the world" conclusion he put forward in that article[3] gradually changed. First, in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, it reappeared in the notion of 'edifying philosophy'. This is a kind of philosophy that concentrates on *'Bildung'*, on the "project of finding new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking"[4], without intending to say anything about real objects.

...edifying philosophers have to decry the very notion of having a view, while avoiding having a view about having views. (...) Perhaps saying things is not always saying how things are. Perhaps saying *that* is itself not a case of saying how things are. (...) We must get the visual, and in particular the mirroring,

---

[1]Richard Rorty, "The World Well Lost", in *The Journal of Philosophy* 69, 1972.
[2] ibid. p. 661. "Intuition" is not used here in the technical sense (translating "Anschauung") in which it is used throughout this study.
[3]ibid. p. 659.
[4]Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 360.

metaphors out of our speech altogether. To do that we have to understand speech not only as not the externalizing of inner representations, but as not a representation at all. We have to drop the notion of correspondence for sentences as well as for thoughts, and see sentences as connected with other sentences rather than with the world.[5]

A few years later the same theme reappeared in still another notion: the provocative notion of a post-Philosophical culture.[6] One of the most characteristic features of such a culture is the complete absence of Philosophers-with-a-capital-P, people trying to give an ultimate account of the relation between thoughts and objects. In Rorty's words:

In a post-Philosophical culture it would be clear that that ["its own time apprehended in thoughts"] is all that philosophy can be. It cannot answer questions about the relation of the thought of our time — the descriptions it is using, the vocabularies it employs — to something that is not just some alternative vocabulary. So it is a study of the comparative advantages and disadvantages of the various ways of talking that our race has invented.[7]

Rorty's recommendation that we should do philosophy without being interested in the relation between thoughts and objects, rests, as I will argue, (1) on his acceptance of a radical distinction between '*finding* a meaningful world' and '*making* the world meaningful', in combination with (2) the assumption that the aporetic character of our accounts of thinking has only to do with our obsession with 'the world', and (3) his mistaken conviction that (a) we can get rid of 'the world' once we get rid of *finding*, because (b) 'the world' is, in the case of '*making* the world meaningful', nothing but a dummy-term — all this slogan is about, is that thinking means nothing but *'making sense'*.

As different critics have argued, Rorty adheres, notwithstanding his attempt to overcome our Western philosophical tradition, to a rather traditional 'either/or'. Although he does not accept the following dilemma

---

[5]ibid. p. 371-372.
[6]See for instance the introduction to Rorty's *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis, 1982)
[7]ibid. p. xl.

either there is some basic foundational constraint or we are confronted with intellectual and moral chaos[8]

arguing that we should not take sides here, he nonetheless assumes the following dilemma in which he passionately takes sides:

either we are speaking about reality or we are just talking[9].

The point that I want to bring out, is that both the dilemma that Rorty wants to sidestep and the one he is accused of as forcing on us, are variations of the following misdirected *either/or*:

Either thinking is a matter of '*finding* a meaningful world', *or* merely a matter of '*making* sense'.

To make my point, I shall first analyse Rorty's argument against the mere possibility of 'mirroring' as an adequate account of thinking, claiming that the argument is based on the assumption that 'mirroring' means '*finding* a meaningful world', in the strict sense that it implies judgements that truly specify the veritable properties of real objects. In addition I shall analyse Rorty's introduction of *Bildung* as an adequate account of thinking, claiming that Rorty's distorted and partial appro-

---

[8] According to Richard Bernstein ("Philosophy in the Conversation of Mankind", *Review of Metaphysics* 33, (1980), p. 763) this is the grand Either/Or that Rorty wants to overcome, but notice the resemblance between this pair of alternatives and the ones below that Caputo, Bernstein and Goldman found in Rorty's plea for 'edifying philosophy'.

[9] See John Caputo "The Thought of Being and the Conversation of Mankind: the Case of Heidegger and Rorty" *Review of Metaphysics* 36, (1983), pp. 667-668: "either a metaphysical correspondence theory or a kind of neo-nominalism; either we are speaking about reality or we are just talking; either our talk has ontological bearing or it is just talk". See also the variations of other critics: "Either we are *ineluctably* tempted by foundational metaphors and the desperate attempt to escape from history *or* we must frankly recognize that philosophy itself is at best a form of "kibbutzing"", in Richard Bernstein, op.cit. p. 767. "*Either* all justification, whether in matters of knowledge or morals, appeals to social practices *or* to illusory foundations", Bernstein, ibid. p. 772. "*either* knowledge (or justification) is a matter of accuracy of representation, or causal interaction, *or* it is a matter of social or linguistic practice", in Alvin Goldman's book review of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, in *The Philosophical Review XC* (1981), p. 426

priation of Gadamer's hermeneutics shows his attempt to equate 'thinking' with '*making* sense'. I shall close this chapter by a short analysis of Rorty's claim that actually nothing deep hinges on the distinction between '*finding*' and '*making*'[10], a claim that seems to belie my interpretation of his position.

It is important to keep in mind that I use these arguments only to show that Rorty's underestimation of the aporetic character of the structure of our accounts of thinking is responsible for the problems his view involves.

First then I want to take a look at Rorty's interpretation of the traditional philosophical attempt to give a comprehensive account of thinking. According to Rorty, philosophy in the West, at least since Descartes, Locke and Kant[11], assumes

(1) that Our Glassy Essence" is a 'container of images'[12] some of which do, while others do not represent their originals accurately;
(2) that thinking of reality can only be a matter of the images that do represent their originals accurately — since reality consists of originals[13]; and
(3) that we, therefore, need a general theory of representation to tell us how to separate the images that do represent their originals accurately (the *privileged representations*[14]) from those that do not.

---

[10] *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 344.
[11] Because of their confusions philosophy became 'theory of knowledge'. ibid. pp.131-164.
[12] Although this term does not sound very philosophical, it covers "the notion of a single inner space in which bodily and perceptual sensations (...), mathematical truths, moral rules, the idea of God, moods of depression, and all the rest of what we now call "mental" were objects of quasi-observation" of which Rorty is speaking. ibid. p. 50.
[13] This is, according to Rorty, a Platonic legacy; ibid. pp. 157-160. See also the "Introduction: Pragmatism and Philosophy" to *Consequences of Pragmatism*, especially pp. xiii-xix.
[14] see particularly *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, pp. 165-173.

Rorty is opposed to this conception of philosophy. He claims that we do not need a theory of the relation between thoughts and objects at all, because it is essentially impossible for us to separate images that do represent their originals accurately from those that do not, *because there are neither images nor originals*. Thinking of reality, conceived of as *'mirroring'* it, is, according to Rorty, a misleading Cartesian invention.[15] The target of his argument is the notion of *privileged representations*. Using, respectively, Sellars and Quine, he argues that two candidates "— intuitions and concepts[16] — fell into disrepute in the latter days of the analytic movement"[17], and, using his inside knowledge he ingeniously argues for the inescapable failure of attempts in empirical psychology and philosophy of language to find new candidates. In short, Rorty argues that there are no beliefs hooked on to the World; beliefs that pass as knowledge have an authority by reference to what society lets us say. To put it differently, if 'S knows that p' we had better take that as "a remark about the status of S's reports among his peers" and not as "a remark about the relation between subject and object, between nature and its mirror".[18] Now this set of alternatives makes sense only once we assume that thinking is *either* a matter of '*finding* a meaningful world' *or* merely a matter of '*making* sense'. In other words, only if we assume such a rigid *either/or* is it acceptable to infer the senselessness of a relation between thoughts and objects from the impossibility to distinguish between images and their originals. This becomes the more evident once we look at the way Rorty elaborates on the distinction between these alternatives.

On the one hand we have, according to Rorty, a position, misleadingly[19] called *epistemological behaviorism*, which combines a view of truth that is pragmatic of character with a "therapeutic" approach to ontology, meaning by that something like 'deconstructive'[20]. Thus, we

---

[15] See ibid. pp. 45-69 for this ill-sounding 'invention'-talk.

[16] Despite the Anglo-Saxon context, these notions are used here in their technical (Kantian) sense.

[17] ibid. p. 168.

[18] ibid. p. 175

[19] Richard Bernstein notes, correctly, that the choice of this term is unfortunate because it suggests that Rorty introduces a new and better epistemological position. Op.cit. p. 757

[20] *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,* p. 175. See ibid. p. 7, on the meaning of "therapeutic".

had better stop doing ontology, for there is nothing more to understand about why we say this rather than that once we understand the rules of the language-game. This is the position that Rorty is arguing for, using Quine and Sellars:

> Thus for Quine, a necessary truth is just a statement such that nobody has given us any interesting alternative which would lead us to question it. For Sellars, to say that a report of a passing thought is incorrigible is to say that nobody has yet suggested a good way of predicting and controlling human behavior which does not take sincere first-person contemporary reports of thought at face-value.[21]

On the other hand we have a position which aims to make truth more than 'warranted assertability', more than what society lets us say. This is the position Rorty is opposed to, because it necessarily gets entangled in hopeless ontological explanations, which

> usually take the form of a redescription of the object of knowledge so as to "bridge the gap" between it and the knowing subjects. To choose between these approaches is to choose between truth as "what is good for us to believe" and truth as "contact with reality".[22]

Hence, what Rorty is opposed to is the idea that beliefs might be informative about reality, *as if it is something we can find*. But, he claims, there is nothing to be found; all there is to say about the informativeness of judgements is what our peers will let us get away with saying: it is only a matter of *making* sense.

The same rigid *either/or* reappears in Rorty's appropriation of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is, according to Rorty, largely the name for a struggle against the assumption that all contributions to a given discourse are commensurable.[23] Hermeneutics sees culture as a conversation between speakers who do not share a common goal, or common ground, but whose paths through life have fallen together, and who never lose the hope of agreement so long as the conversation

---

[21] ibid. p. 175.
[22] ibid. p. 176.
[23] *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 316.

lasts, although they all know that there is no disciplinary matrix that unites them from the start.[24] This means that hermeneutics is the attempt to make sense of what is going on at a stage where we are still too unsure about our conversation to describe it; it is the study of *abnormal* discourse, which is what happens when someone joins in the discourse who is ignorant of the conventions that structure normal discourse, or who sets them aside.[25] As such, hermeneutics is radically opposed to epistemology, but not to be sure as an alternative for the same kind of task. No, it is precisely an expression of the hope that we will stop doing what we tried to do but cannot (and need not).[26] In Rorty's words:

> Hermeneutics is not "another way of knowing" — "understanding" as opposed to (predictive) "explanation". It is better seen as another way of coping.[27]

There is, probably, a sense in which this all has to do with Gadamer, but Rorty definitely makes the author of *Wahrheit und Methode*[28] too much into a hero of his own. That is, although Gadamer admits that hermeneutics expresses the open-endedness of dialogues, the need to receive the unfamiliar, the absence of a common ground, the radical historicity of our opinions (our prejudices), and the Heideggerian critique of the correspondence theory, it expresses as well our embeddedness in what Gadamer calls a *Wirkungsgeschichte*.[29] In other words, there is an important aspect in Gadamer's account of what hermeneutics boils down to that is completely absent in Rorty's discussion. Whereas Rorty enthusiastically accepts the critical part of hermeneutics, i.e. the critique of method as the sole path to truth, he only accepts half of the constructive part. He likes to substitute "the notion of *Bildung* (education, self-formation) for that of "knowledge" as the goal of thinking"[30] (assuming wrongly that Gadamer did just

---

[24] ibid. p. 318.
[25] ibid. p. 320. 'Abnormal' stands for what Kuhn calls 'revolutionary' as opposed to 'normal' science.
[26] ibid. p. 315.
[27] ibid. p. 356.
[28] Tübingen, 1960.
[29] *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 283ff.
[30] *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, 1979), p. 359.

that[31]), but he does not like Gadamer's stress on *Bildung* as embedded in a *Wirkungsgeschichte*.[32] Hence Rorty neglects the fact that, according to Gadamer, *Bildung* is not just a matter of *making* sense by means of inventing new descriptions of oneself, or of one's world, but a matter of being *sensitive*

('offen') to what wants to get disclosed ('die Sache'). *Bildung* is not just a matter of voluntary, creative self-formation, but a matter of asking the right questions, once confronted with the unfamiliar.[33] The point of Gadamer's stress, then, is not what Rorty takes it to be:

> Gadamer develops his notion of *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein* (the sort of consciousness of the past which changes us) to characterize an attitude interested not so much in what is out there in the world, or in what happened in history, as in what we can get out of nature and history for our own uses.[34]

The phrase "for our own uses" is particularly inappropriate. The point of the *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein* is, quite to the contrary, that we must be ready to be 'taken' by the subject-matter of the dialogue between us and our tradition:

> To have a conversation means to put oneself under the guidance of the issue [Sache] at which the conversation partners are directed. In order to have a conversation one should not silence the other with arguments, but should really consider the strength of the point of the other opinion. It is therefore an art of trying. The art of trying is however the art of asking. For as we say: to ask means to uncover [Offenlegen] and to expose [ins Offene stellen].[35]

---

[31] ibid. But see Joel Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics* (Yale, 1985), p.68.

[32] John Caputo, in his "The Thought of Being and the Conversation of Mankind: The Case of Heidegger and Rorty" pp. 678-681, stresses that Rorty misses this part of hermeneutics on purpose, and not because of ignorance.

[33] See particularly pp. 324-360 of H.-G. Gadamer *Wahrheit und Methode (Tübingen, 1960)*, the section entitled "Analyse des wirkungsgeschichtlichen Bewußtseins".

[34] *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 359.

[35] My translation. "Ein Gespräch führen heißt, sich unter die Führung der Sache stellen, auf die die Gesprächspartner gerichtet sind. Ein Gespräch führen verlangt, den anderen nicht niederzuargumentieren, sondern im Gegenteil das sachliche Gewicht der anderen Meinung wirklich zu erwägen. Sie ist daher eine Kunst des Erprobens. Die Kunst des Erprobens ist aber die Kunst des Fragens. Denn wir sahen: Fragen heißt Offenlegen und ins Offene stellen."*Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 349.

And again, this questioning, of which Rorty wants to make use in his suggestion that a philosopher should be an "informed dilettante"[36], is not quite what Rorty makes of it, for in his hands it turns out to be only a questioning of the all-too-obvious: an 'uncovering' but not an 'exposing'.[37]

Reacting on an earlier version of this chapter Rorty asks "why all that stuff about solidarity in my "Solidarity or Objectivity?" doesn't take account of our *Wirkungsgeschichte*"[38]. My reply, however, is just an extension of the argument I developed so far. For Rorty 'solidarity' is given with the need we feel to privilege, in practice, our own group. As he writes, solidarity means that we

> should accept the fact that we have to start from where we are, and that this means that there are lots of views which we simply cannot take seriously.[39]

Such an interpretation of solidarity, however, presupposes that a culture consists of a set of clear and evident beliefs, and that we are bound to enter the 'Conversation of Mankind' with our own prejudices about the value of this set of beliefs. Taken this way, solidarity amounts indeed to an "ethnocentrism", a "lonely provincialism"[40], to preferring the company of "those who share enough of one's beliefs to make fruitful conversation possible[41].

---

[36] *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 317.

[37] Perhaps my disagreement with David Hiley's interpretation of Rorty (*Philosophy in Question. Essays on a Pyrrhonian Theme*, Chicago, 1988, pp. 143-173.)— which turns him into a contemporary advocate of the Pyrrhonian challenge to philosophy — can best be stated with respect to this point. It might be true that Rorty wants to keep the conversation going by constantly calling current agreement into question, but what would be the point in so doing, other than that current agreement tends to conceal its problematical character? In other words, if there is any point in the Pyrrhonian challenge to philosophy, then only because of our interest in the Platonic attempt to escape from the contingencies of our condition. See the tenor of Maimonian skepticism. See also Stanley Rosen's review of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. "I hope that Rorty will not reject me as too Platonic when I say that he provides us with no basis for keeping the conversation going, or for distinguishing between a dull and an interesting path." in *Review of Metaphysics*, 1980, p.800.

[38] In a letter to me, dated August 26, 1988. The article to which Rorty refers appeared a.o. in *Post-Analytic Philosophy*, ed. J. Rajchman and C. West, (New York, 1985)

[39] "Solidarity or Objectivity?", p. 12.

[40] ibid.

[41] ibid. p. 13.

But the point Gadamer makes by stressing that *Bildung* must be embedded in a *Wirkungsgeschichte*, is exactly to emphasize that an essential part of our culture is something which so far did not succeed in unfolding itself in terms of clear and evident beliefs. In other words, what makes a culture what it is, is according to Gadamer not that we just like to say what we are used to say, but that there is something which wants to be said, and to which we must try to be sensitive even if we do not succeed in revealing it, i.e. even if we do not know how to formulate exactly what we try to say. This is not chimerical. It is just to say that a crucial part of what makes up a culture is a collection of problems and questions, rather than just a collection of solutions and answers. For, it are problems and questions which on the one hand resist clear formulations and on the other hand attract our attention and evoke our desire for a more comprehensive understanding of reality, as if it was more than just what we say it is.[42]

In order to conclude, then, I want to suggest that Rorty's interpretation of Gadamer's hermeneutics is based upon his conviction that '*making* sense' has nothing to do with '*finding* a meaningful world'. For, only if we take for granted that Rorty assumes such a radical separation between the two, and only if we realize Rorty's sympathy for an account of thinking in terms of 'making sense', can we understand his attempt to appropriate the notion of *Bildung* without its embeddedness in the idea of a *Wirkungsgeschichte* — as if, while thinking, there is nothing to look for, nothing to be sensitive to. And indeed, realizing Rorty's aversion to an account of thinking in terms of '*finding* a meaningful world', we can understand his attempt to get rid of the idea of a *Wirkungsgeschichte*, treated as the history of concealing and revealing Being.[43]

In his attempt to appropriate hermeneutics as a substitute for epistemology, Rorty comes across the distinction between "nature" and

---

[42] The point is, in other words, that, in order to ask the right questions, we have to be sensitive to what is beyond our grasp, as if there was a 'transcendent object' we try to make sense *of*.

[43] See Rorty's critique of Heidegger in his "Overcoming the Tradition: Heidegger and Dewey". Reprinted in *Consequences of Pragmatism*, pp. 37 -59; especially, pp. 52-54.

"spirit".[44] Traditionally, hermeneutics is thought of as peculiarly suited to "spirit", whereas some other method is appropriate to "nature". According to Rorty, there is a lot of confusion going on around here. While unraveling these confusions he makes a few remarks about the distinction between the imagery of *making* and of *finding*, which are very interesting and revealing with respect to the point I try to make.

Rorty wants to separate off "the romantic notion of man as self-creative [from] the Kantian notion of man as constituting a phenomenal world, and the Cartesian notion of man as containing a special immaterial ingredient".[45] According to him, the traditional coming together of these notions led Kuhnians to the use of phrases like "being presented with a new world", rather than "using a new description for the world", and antireductionists like Charles Taylor to defend a

> notion of man as a being who changes from the inside by finding better (or, at least, novel) ways of describing, predicting, and explaining himself. Nonhuman beings, as mere *êtres-en-soi*, do not get changed from inside but are simply described, predicted, and explained in a better vocabulary.[46]

What is wrong, according to Rorty, with this latter position, is that it leads us back into an untenable metaphysical dualism. And what is wrong with the Kuhnian vocabulary is that it leads from repudiating the metaphysical dualism to the ridiculous "suggestion that part of man's self-creation consists in "constituting" atoms and inkwells".[47] Rorty's 'therapy' is very simple: the deep meaning of the difference between '*finding* the truth about the *en-soi*' and '*making* the truth about the *pour-soi*' vanishes completely once we realize that the only things we find or make are *ways of speaking*. Talk about "nature" is a way of speaking we might be said to *find*, because nature

> is whatever is so routine and familiar and manageable that we trust our own language implicitly[48],

---

[44] *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, pp. 343-356.
[45] ibid. p. 346. Cf. p. 358
[46] ibid. p. 351.
[47] ibid. p. 346.

while talk about "spirit" happens to be, as things are now, a way of speaking we need to *make*, because spirit

> is whatever is so unfamiliar and unmanageable that we begin to wonder whether our "language" is "adequate" to it. (...) it is just wonder about whether we do not need to change our vocabulary, and not just our assertions.[48]

Rorty, to be sure, thinks it would be better to drop the distinction between "nature" and "spirit" altogether. After all, it might well be that the coincidence of the parallel between, on the one hand, the unfamiliar and the *Geisteswissenschaften*, and on the other hand, the familiar and the *Naturwissenschaften*, is a mere coincidence. All we actually have is 'ways of speaking', some of which we trust and some of which we doubt. This difference, to be sure, is according to Rorty nothing but a difference in familiarity; it is a matter of social practice.

My point here is that Rorty's denial of a real distinction between '*finding*' and '*making*' makes sense only once we assume that *ways of speaking* are all there is. But this latter assumption implies at the same time a radical distinction between '*finding* a meaningful world' and '*making* sense'. This distinction is, as I have argued in this chapter, a misdirected distinction between what Rorty thinks is an improper interpretation of judgements (as if they only have to do with the veritable properties of real objects) and his favourite kind of interpretation of judgements (as if they only have to do with the specification of positions within a conceptual framework).

Although the position Rorty defends is very different from the one defended by Rosenberg, the conclusion of this chapter is that both are insensitive to the *tension* between an account of thinking in terms of '*finding* a meaningful world' and one in terms of '*making* the world meaningful'. Both American philosophers neglect the aporetic character of the structure of our accounts of thinking. Whereas Rosenberg assumes that both accounts are, in the final analysis, different versions of one and the same coherent and comprehensive account of the relation between thoughts and objects, Rorty assumes that they refer, in

---

[48] ibid. pp. 352-353.

fact, to absolutely different practices. Next I shall turn to Thomas Nagel, arguing that, although he shows an awareness of the aporetic character of accounts of thinking, he mistakenly assumes that he can provide a comprehensive account of this aporetic character as being a feature of the problematical nature of thinking itself.

CHAPTER 3

NAGEL:

FINDING AS MAKING FROM NOWHERE

Ever since his "What is it like to be a bat?"[1], Thomas Nagel's writings have been dominated by one single problem: "how to combine the perspective of a particular person inside the world with an objective view of that same world, the person and his viewpoint included"[2] In this chapter I argue that the way in which Nagel deals with this problem shows (a) that he is definitely aware of the aporetic character of any account of the relation between thoughts and objects, but (b) that he unwarrantably assumes that this aporetic character is a consequence of the relation itself, and not of the structure of our accounts of it.

I shall deal with Nagel's claims in two sections. First I shall discuss his refusal to accept the kind of connection Kant makes between an empirical kind of realism and a transcendental kind of idealism. Subsequently, I shall criticise his analysis of what he calls *human self-trans-*

---

[1] Originally published in *The Philosophical Review*, LXXXIII (1974), reprinted in Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge, 1979.
[2] Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, Oxford, 1986, p. 3.

cendence, arguing that his speculations about objective and subjective 'selves' implies the same kind of mistake he accuses Kant of as having made, namely, taking an intrinsic characteristic of accounts of X for a characteristic of X itself.

1. Realism

Realism, according to Nagel, is the thesis that there is a world in which we are contained, and whose constitution is independent of our minds. This view implies that we must accept the possibility that what there is does not coincide necessarily with what is a possible object of thought for us.[3] That is, the idea of realism implies a strong form of what Nagel calls *anti-humanism*. Once we think that there is a world independent of our minds, we have to admit that this world is not *our* world, not even potentially.[4a] In this way, and only in this way, is realism opposed to idealism, which is according to Nagel the presupposition that what there is *cannot* be thought to be something completely beyond our capacities to grasp it. To put it differently, idealism is, according to Nagel, the view that reality cannot be anything that cannot be conceived by us, or our human descendants.[4]

Nagel thinks that Kant is one of his most powerful opponents as regards this anti-humanism (i.e. as regards the incompatibility of realism with idealism). And indeed, Kant argued very strongly that the world we live in *is bound to be* our world. Of course, Kant accepted the possibility, even the necessity, of a noumenal world, but he stressed that this noumenal world could not be fleshed out. Probably it is nothing but a limiting concept, although it is hard to understand on such an interpretation what is meant by Kant's claim that we need this

---

[3] *The View from Nowhere*, p. 92.

[4a] ibid. p. 108

[4] Note that there is an extremely diverse use of the notions 'realism' and 'idealism'. According to Nagel, Rosenberg, who thinks of himself as defending a constitutive realism, is an idealist, as well as Putnam, who thinks of himself as defending an 'internal realism'. Rescher, however, defending a view very similar to Putnam, calls this view, in agreement with Nagel's use of the notion, a conceptual idealism. See Rosenberg, *One World and Our Knowledge of It*, pp. 22-86; Putnam, "Reason and Realism" in *Meaning and the Moral Sciences*, pp. 123-138; and Rescher, *Conceptual Idealism*, pp. 24-26.

noumenal world in order to be able to explain the existence of our phenomenal world.[5]

Nagel's point is that Kant must have missed a crucial distinction: if our human point of view enters our conception of the world it might do so as *form* and as *content*. That is, although our picture of the world will always have the *form* of a *human* picture (it being stated in a human language, or pictured in the modes of our senses), it does not necessarily have a *human content*. By means of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities Nagel clarifies his point, relying on Colin McGinn's *The Subjective View*.[6] In explaining the secondary qualities of phenomena, for example a tomato's looking red, we do not need the tomato's really being red. The tomato's looking red is, in other words, a matter of *human content*. Once we transcend our point of view (at least, our *perceptual* point of view) we understand that 'being red' is not a quality of physical objects: their looking red can be analysed in terms of (i.e. can be reduced to) their having specific primary qualities. On the other hand, we have no good reason to believe that primary qualities of phenomena, for example a tomato's spherical extension, are a matter of *human content*:

> We can't explain the fact that things look spatially extended except in terms of their being extended. And we can't explain the fact that *that* explanation seems true except again in terms of things being extended (...) And so on.[7]

Of course, there is an easy reply for Kantians. Precisely because we cannot conceive of an explanation of primary qualities in other terms, we must accept that the world we live in is *our* world. The distinction

---

[5] These are difficult matters, that I will leave aside here. In discussing Maimon I will, of course, go more deeply into these problems. Nagel's interpretation of Kant is relatively simple; let me quote him in full: "The Kantian view that primary qualities, too, describe the world only as it appears to us depends on taking the entire system of scientific explanation of observable phenomena as itself an appearance, whose ultimate explanation cannot without circularity refer to primary qualities since they on the contrary have to be explained in terms of it. Primary qualities are nothing more on this view than an aspect of our world picture, and if that picture has an explanation, it must be in terms of the effect on us of something outside it, which will for that reason be unimaginable to us–the noumenal world." p. 101.

[6] Colin McGinn, *The Subjective View*, (Oxford, 1983)

[7] *The View from Nowhere*, p. 102.

between primary and secondary qualities reflects the distinction between perception and conception, a distinction that does not parallel the distinction between 'appearances' and 'things in themselves'. Perceptions as well as conceptions are 'appearances', possible objects of thought *for us*. Nagel realizes this reply, but he does not seem to be very impressed by this "nonexplanation in terms of the inconceivable noumenal world".[8] His point is that there is no good reason to claim that our conception of the theoretical possibility to transcend our point of view, a conception necessarily given with the idea of realism, is nothing but just another higher-order description of the world as it appears to us.

> To insist otherwise is to assume that if any conception has a possessor, it must be about the possessor's point of view—a slide from subjective form to subjective content.[9]

It might help here to reformulate the quarrel between Nagel and Kant in terms of the distinction between '*finding* a meaningful world' and '*making* the world meaningful'. Nagel thinks that once we take the idea of realism for granted, i.e. once we accept the intelligibility of objectivity, it must with respect to *every* judgement be possible, *in principle*, to distinguish between whether it specifies a location within a conceptual framework or a property of an object. We can try for such a distinction between *finding* and *making* by transcending our particularity and our type, even though this self-transcendence will never be absolute.[10]

From the Kantian point of view, however, it is impossible to distinguish *on one and the same level* between judgements that specify a location within a conceptual framework and those that specify a property of an object. This is so because, according to Kant, realism cannot be anything but *empirical* realism, and this kind of realism is only possible in connection with a specific kind of *transcendental* idealism, which is, so to speak, nothing but the other side of one and the same picture. Thus, any judgement that specifies a property of an object

---

[8] ibid. p. 103.
[9] ibid. p. 104.
[10] See the next section, below pp. 39ff.

concerns the world of appearances, and might, from the transcendental point of view, correctly be said to specify a location within our human conceptual framework. Hence, the Kantian tendency to maintain that, for example, the spatial extension of empirical objects is merely a feature of our way of understanding reality.

Nagel, however, is unwilling to accept the necessary conjunction of empirical realism with Transcendental Idealism. According to him, there is ground only for a more moderate claim. He asserts that if we are unable to unmask our beliefs about, for example, the spatial extension of physical things as specifying nothing but locations within a conceptual framework, we must be careful in two different ways: (1) we should realize the skeptical possibility that we mistakenly treat our '*making* the world meaningful' as '*finding* a meaningful world'; *and* (2) we should not think that this inability uncovers a transcendental truth. We should be moderate, acknowledging that we just don't know (yet) whether our judgement about reality as spatially extended specifies a property of empirical objects or their location within our conceptual framework, or, perhaps, a bit of both. The modesty Nagel urges for, leads to the awareness of a serious problem as regards our ability to give a comprehensive account of the relation between thoughts and objects. The problem presents itself, according to Nagel, in two different ways.

On the one hand, we have to accept skepticism as objectivity's twin[11]. Although objectivity must be a picture of the world from no point of view in particular, we cannot understand the possibility of it *not* being based on a *specific* point of view at all. Hence it seems to be the case that whatever forms the objective conception of the world cannot itself be included in this objective picture. Therefore, it seems

> to follow that the most objective view we can achieve will have to rest on an unexamined subjective base, and since we can never abandon our own point of view, but can only alter it, the idea that we are coming closer to the reality outside it with each successive step has no foundation.[12]

---

[11] *The View from Nowhere*, pp. 67-71. This is more often heard, lately. See also, for example, P.F. Strawson's *Naturalism and skepticism: some varieties* (Oxford, 1985)
[12] *The View from Nowhere*, p. 68.

If there is a world independent of our minds, then objectivity is a real possibility (for such a world will have properties conceivable from nowhere in particular — that is, from *the* objective point of view), but so is skepticism (since *we* can never free ourselves completely from *our* point of view, we will never reach a view from nowhere).

On the other hand we will realize that once *both* skepticism *and* objectivity are real possibilities *for us*, it might turn out to be impossible for us to know whether we are *able* or *unable* to transcend our human point of view. It is with respect to the problematic of human self-transcendence that Nagel shows his awareness of the aporetic character of the structure of our accounts of thinking. But, as I will argue in the next section, it is precisely with respect to this problematic that Nagel makes the same mistake as Kant — "a slide from subjective form to subjective content".

2. Human self-transcendence

One of the most constant themes in Nagel's work is the problematic of human self-transcendence. Although the notion appeared for the first time in the programmatic article "Subjective and Objective"[13], the theme it refers to was already central in his celebrated "What is it like to be a bat?", and is still at the core of his latest publication[14]. This predominance is comprehensible, granted Nagels view of realism.

There is a development in Nagel's treatment of the subject. His initially largely negative result, that reduction is not always a good way of transcending one's point of view, changed via an attempt to understand why self-transcendence is such a problematic affair to a wildly speculative account of it in terms of all of us having, or being, besides our natural *subjective* self, an *objective* self as well, capable of conceiving the world from nowhere within it in particular. I shall take a look at each of these stages, arguing that the direction in which Nagel's view

---

[13] This article appeared for the first time as the final chapter of *Mortal questions* (pp. 196-213). Despite this place, the article is really more of an introduction to subsequent work.

[14] i.e. *The View from Nowhere.*

develops shows an unwarranted tendency to think that the aporetic character of accounts of thinking is a consequence of our way of thinking rather than of the structure of our *accounts* of it.

The point of Nagel's "What is it like to be a bat?" was to reveal a fundamental unclarity in the reductionism implied by physicalistic theories of the mind. In almost all fields of knowledge the process of reduction is a move in the direction of greater objectivity. That is, in order to understand more of, for example, the nature of snow, it is good practice to try to get out of your specific point of view of snow. This is true of you, and also of Italians, Eskimo's, skiers, the Abominable Snowman, etc. The best conception of snow is an objective one, a conception with a content independent of any view towards snow in particular, a conception equally conceivable by you, and the Italians, Eskimo's, etc. The reductionism involved in such a move towards greater objectivity is nothing but the idea that those aspects in your particular conception of snow that *cannot* be aspects of the conception of snow of, for example, the Abominable Snowman, must be left out of the picture. In other words, getting a better grasp of snow consists in trying to reduce those aspects of snow that are only aspects of snow *dependent* on a specific viewpoint to aspects of snow that are *independent* of those specific viewpoints.

In accordance with this general practice of reduction, physicalistic theories of the mind assume that getting a better conception of the nature of experience is a matter of reducing the aspects dependent on a specific point of view towards experience. But now, there is the problem that one of the essential aspects of experience is 'what it is like' for an organism to have it — the "subjective character of experience", in Nagel's words.[15] And as regards this aspect, it is fundamentally unclear whether the practice of reduction will make sense:

> Certainly it *appears* unlikely that we will get closer to the real nature of human experience by leaving behind the particularity of our human point of view and striving for a description in terms accessible to beings that could not imagine what it was like to be us. If the subjective character of experience is fully com-

[15] *Mortal Questions*, p. 166

prehensible only from one point of view, then any shift to greater objectivity — that is, less attachment to a specific viewpoint — does not take us nearer to the real nature of the phenomenon: it takes us farther away from it.[16]

Using an insecure terminology, one might think that the point is that it does make sense to reduce 'appearances' to 'realities' with respect to the *external* world, but *not* with respect to the *'internal'* world, because the furniture of the 'internal' world consists of nothing but 'appearances'. The greyness of a tomato under a red light should be reduced to its redness under normal circumstances, so as to get rid of unreal colours. But in order to understand the nature of the grey appearance *as* appearance, such a practice does not make sense, for it leaves us without any appearances at all. Such a traditional formulation has its point, but it is slightly misleading as well, because it tends to regard 'appearances' as private objects, thus mislocating, according to Nagel, their subjectivity.

There is a sense in which phenomenological facts are perfectly objective: one person can know or say of another what the quality of the other's experience is. They are subjective, however, in the sense that even this objective ascription of experience is possible only for someone sufficiently similar to the object of ascription to be able to adopt his point of view[17]

The central notion with respect to experience is indeed *not* that an experience consists of 'appearances', private objects with nothing but phenomenological properties, but that it, according to Nagel, implies *'having a point of view'*, that it makes sense to ask 'what it is like' for the organism that has the experience to have it. And it is this 'having a view', as an essential feature of experience, that, Nagel argues, explains the problematic character of psycho-physical reduction. But what is more, and here Nagel moves beyond the mind-body problem into the problematic of the relation between thoughts and objects, 'having a view' reveals that there might be objective facts that *we* cannot possibly comprehend. Bats 'know' facts about their environment. Such facts might probably be reduced to facts we know too, because we and the

---

16 ibid. p. 174
17 ibid. p. 172

bats both perceive trees and insects and the like, although we do not perceive them in the way bats do. There might be a lot of facts about those natural objects that can be grasped from both points of view. But, because of their 'having a view', we should expect bats to 'know' facts about 'what it is like' for them to have those experiences of trees and insects, too. And these latter facts we cannot possibly comprehend.

> Reflection on what it is like to be a bat seems to lead us, therefore, to the conclusion that there are facts that do not consist in the truth of propositions expressible in a human language. We can be compelled to recognize the existence of such facts without being able to state or comprehend them.[18]

This is a far-reaching conclusion, as it implies that an account of thinking based on reduction probably *cannot* be comprehensive. Thinking of reality probably is not the same as reducing a *specific* understanding of reality to an, ideally speaking, completely *unspecific* understanding of reality. There might, on the one hand, be judgements that are informative about the objects they apply to just because they specify properties of these objects. This might, for example, be the case with judgements that specify primary qualities of physical objects. But we have to admit, on the other hand, the possibility of there being judgements that are informative about the objects they apply to just because they specify a location within a particular conceptual framework, without it being possible to reconstruct these judgements as being informative because of their specifying properties of objects. This might, for example, be the case with judgements that concern the "what is it like"-aspects of secondary qualities. Thus, in realizing the tension between the *subjective* aspect of *having* a point of view and the *objective* conception of reality produced by such a point of view, Nagel appears to be aware of the aporetic character of the structure of a comprehensive account of thinking. It might be the case that thinking is both a matter of '*finding* a meaningful world' and of '*making* the world meaningful', without it being possible to understand how these different 'models' are to be related to one another.

---

[18] ibid. p. 171.

In "Subjective and Objective" there is a change of emphasis. Nagel now presents the problem as how to value the presence of incompatible objective and subjective *points of view*, suggesting, as I would put it, that we can get a comprehensive account of it in terms of the problematic of human self-transcendence.

Nagel begins by making a distinction between the notion of an objective point of view and that of a subjective point of view, suggesting these notions to be *relative* to one another, as if they refer to the extremes of some kind of continuum. Thus, the notions of a subjective and an objective point of view do not form different categories, but mark out a continuum, with on one end the point of view of a particular individual, and on the other end "a conception of the world which as far as possible is not the view from anywhere within it".[19] Nagel acknowledges the possibility of there being not really an end-point on this objective side of the continuum, but only some regulative ideal. Once we imagine such a kind of continuum, he argues, we can understand the relativity of different viewpoints, in the sense that a general human point of view will be more objective than mine, but less objective than the point of view of physical science.

Because of this polar relativity, understanding the relation between a subjective and an objective point of view is, according to Nagel, mainly a question of understanding the *process of detachment*,[20] which is the process of transition from a more subjective point of view to a more objective one. 'Reduction' is one kind of interpretation of this process, but as we saw in the case of psychophysical reduction, it is not always clear what 'reduction' is supposed to be. The process of detachment, Nagel states now, involves two ways of *transcendence of the self*: a transcendence of particularity and a transcendence of one's type.[21] Advancing our understanding is, at first sight, mainly a matter of these kinds of transcendence.

In terms of *making* and *finding*, it is relatively easy both to understand what Nagel is after and to point out the problematic nature of Nagel's attempt. Presumably, an extremely subjective point of view

---

[19] ibid. p. 206
[20] ibid. p. 208
[21] ibid. p. 209

generates judgements that specify nothing but locations within a conceptual framework, whereas an extremely objective point of view generates judgements that specify nothing but the properties of objects. This latter extreme might, as Nagel notices, be just a regulative ideal: it might still be a judgement that specifies a location within a conceptual framework, but this framework will be so universal, so unbiased by whatever feature of the point of view it embodies, that we might take it as if the judgements it generates really specify nothing but properties of objects. The point of such an imagined continuum is that it allows us to think that a judgement says more about the properties of objects if it identifies a location within a more general conceptual framework. So far, however, this is merely an unwarranted suggestion, motivated perhaps by the meanings of words: an *objective* point of view allows judgements to specify properties of *objects*. And actually, the idea behind this suggestion has the flavour of an unwarranted Kantian 'transcendentalism': if absolutely nobody is able to point out that a particular judgement is informative because it *makes* the world meaningful, why not accept, for the sake of simplicity, that this judgement is informative because it allows us to *find* a meaningful world.

In *The View from Nowhere* Nagel continues his attempt to explain the aporetic character of our accounts of thinking in terms of the intrinsically problematic nature of our human predicament. He does not only hold now that there are subjective and objective *points of view*, but speculates moreover about there being different *'subjects'* related to these points of view too.

> Each of us, then, in addition to being an ordinary person, is a particular objective self, the subject of a perspectiveless conception of reality[22]

The emergence of this objective self, besides our subjective self, is according to Nagel quite unproblematic, given with the simple step of viewing the world as a place containing the person that I am.[23] Thus

---

[22] *The View from Nowhere*, pp. 63-64.

[23] This kind of step plays an important role too, for example, in G.H. Mead's social behaviourism, and in H. Plessner's philosophical anthropology. See G.H. Mead, *Mind,*

being already in some way beyond one's particularity, the objective self might step forward, transcending one's type as well. This last transcendence probably is, to be sure, not really possible, but we can according to Nagel understand what it would involve:

> The aim of objectivity would be to reach a conception of the world, including oneself, which involved one's own point of view not essentially, but only instrumentally, so to speak; so that the form of our understanding would be specific to ourselves, but its content would not be.[24]

The notion of an objective self has an initial advantage: it allows Nagel to give a comprehensive account of the tension between the subjective and the objective point of view as a tension that occurs in everyone of us, indeed in any organism capable of *detachment*. The possession of an objective self allows each of us a rudimentary grasp of reality as being a world in which we are contained and whose constitution is independent of our minds, so that we can understand a difference between the way the world is and the way it seems to us to be.

Introducing the notion of an objective self has, however, an unacceptable consequence as well. For if we take the idea of an objective self at face value, it implies an *absolute* distinction between an objective and a subjective *understanding* of reality. This implication is hard to accept, for different reasons. In the first place we can hardly combine such an absolute distinction with *both* the idea of the everlasting possibility of skepticism, *and* with the polar relativity of objective and subjective *points of view*. More seriously, however, if we are supposed to be an objective self as well as a subjective one, if we have an objective as well as a subjective understanding of reality, then this seems to imply that we have two fundamentally different kinds of experiences. But then it will make sense to hold that there are 'facts' about *what it is like* for me to be an objective self, as well as 'facts' about *what it is like* for me to be a subjective self. Hence, the subjective character of experience does not reside merely in my being a subjective self, but my experiences in the 'objective mode' will have a subjective character too.

Self & Society (Chicago, 1934), and H. Plessner, *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* (Berlin,1927)

[24] *The View from Nowhere*, p. 74.

Therefore, if we are to understand this, and if we accept Nagel's way of understanding the relation between the objective and the subjective character of experience in terms of objective and subjective selves, then we are bound to accept that the experiences of the objective self demand again a distinction between an objective objective self, and a subjective objective self. And this will go on *ad infinitum*. The converse will happen as well. As a subjective self I will no doubt have experiences of more than just the content of my own experiences. Hence, as a subjective self I will be capable of taking a more objective point of view towards the objects of my experiences. But this amounts to a further distinction, at least if we accept Nagel's speculation concerning the distinction between objective and subjective selves, between an objective subjective self and a subjective subjective self. And this too will have to go on *ad infinitum*.

There is obviously something seriously wrong, here. Introducing the notion of an objective self, being the subject of a centerless view of the world[25], leads to an *infinite regress*. For, even according to Nagel himself, at least the one that wrote "What is it like to be a bat?", *having a view* is what is essential to the subjective character of experience.[26]

My diagnosis of what went wrong here is as follows.[27] Nagel has mislocated the origin of the aporetic character of our accounts of thinking, or more carefully, Nagel has made the same mistake he accuses Kant of as having made. To repeat, if it is impossible for us to distinguish between (1) an x being F because of the way in which we conceive of x, and (2) an x really being F, we have to be careful in two ways. On the one hand, we should realize that the implied impossibility to transcend our way of conceiving x implies, as its twin, the skeptical possibility of our *mistakenly* believing x really to be F. And on the other hand, we should not think that the implied impossibility uncovers

---

[25] ibid. p. 64.

[26] See "What is it like to be a bat?", p. 175.

[27] Both A.W. Moore and Colin McGinn make similar observations in their discussions of Nagel's *The View from Nowhere*. "...it is hard to resist the Wittgensteinian charge that he [Nagel] is confusing a kind of grammatical shift with a shift of subject matter". A.W. Moore, in *The Philosophical Quarterly Vol. 37*, 1987, p. 325. "Nagel's stipulation, by contrast, has the consequence that manner of conception transfers itself to truth conceived — a result at odds with his own views". Colin McGinn, in *Mind 96*, 1987, p. 264.

a transcendental truth. With respect to Nagel's unacceptable speculation about all of us having both a subjective and an objective self, this means the following. If it is impossible for us to distinguish between a relation between thoughts and objects having a problematical character because of the way in which we give an account of it, and a relation between thoughts and objects really having a problematical character, we should not assume that this relation is really problematical. And irony has it that it is exactly the failure of Nagel to give a comprehensive account of this relation between thoughts and objects as really being problematical in itself (because of "the dramatic idea of a conflict between selves"[28]), that shows us that such a way of distinguishing is impossible for us.[29]

This leads me to conclude that the need and the impossibility to do justice to two different ways in which judgements might be thought to be informative about the objects they apply to, must be appreciated on the level of our accounts of thinking, because there are no sufficient reasons to assume that the aporetics involved in these accounts follow from the problematical nature of the relation between thoughts and objects itself. Thus, Nagel must be tributed for being aware of the aporetic character of our accounts of thinking, but he must be blamed for underestimating the fact that we have to be moderate, that we have to accept the possibility that the problem he tries to grasp follows from the aporetic character *of the structure of our accounts* of the relation between thoughts and objects.

---

[28] As Colin McGinn puts it. *op.cit.* p. 268.

[29] Even though A.W. Moore's point is another one he also introduces the irony of success by means of failure: "But my charge of fundamental misguidedness is meant as a tribute: Nagel is led astray in ways which redound and are instructive at a fundamental level." *op.cit.* p. 324.

CONCLUSION

In this part I criticised the views of Rosenberg, Rorty and Nagel on the relation between thoughts and objects. The theme of my critique was that the problems implied by their accounts of thinking, reflect the tension between doing justice both to the idea that thinking is like '*finding* a meaningful world' and the idea that it is like '*making* the world meaningful'.

The criticisms put forward allow me to draw the following conclusions. As against Rosenberg it may be objected (1) that it is necessary to distinguish between a conception of thinking in terms of '*finding* a meaningful world' and a conception of thinking in terms of '*making* the world meaningful'; and (2) that it is not the case that these different conceptions are analytically equivalent to one another. In accordance with Rorty it may be argued that it is not possible to give a comprehensive account of thinking merely in terms of '*finding* a meaningful world', but against Rorty it should be objected that it isn't possible as well to give a comprehensive account of thinking merely in terms of '*making* the world meaningful'. Hence, we have to do justice to aspects of both conceptions of the relation between thoughts and objects, even though we do not understand how we could; i.e. we should take the aporetic character of the structure of our accounts of thinking seriously. Finally, as against Nagel, it may be concluded that there are no sufficient reasons to assume that the aporetics involved in our accounts of thinking follow from the problematical nature of the relation between thoughts and objects itself. As I will argue in the next part, this does not mean that we are allowed to conclude that the aporetic character is merely an aspect of our accounts of thinking, even though it must be appreciated on the level of our accounts of thinking. The point is that

we have to be moderate, acknowledging that we just don't know, because we are not in a position to distinguish between the aporetic being a feature of the structure of our accounts of thinking and of it being a feature of the relation between thoughts and objects itself.

PART TWO

SALOMON MAIMON AND THE ANTINOMY OF THOUGHT

"Auch werden sie behaupten, daß ich in meinen Erklärungen nicht selten meine eigene Gedanken dem *Aristoteles* untergelegt habe. Was mich aber anbegrifft, so mag ich, in zweifelhaften Fällen, lieber *meine Gedanken*, als *gar keine* dem *Aristoteles* unterlegen."

Salomon Maimon,
Die Kathegorien des Aristoteles,
(Berlin 1394), p. XI.

INTRODUCTION

In this part I will present a detailed analysis of Maimon's defense of the *Antinomy of Thought* — i.e. the claim that any account of thought, as really being about objects, implies a pair of statements whose conjunction has to be true, even though we cannot understand how this is possible. Stated as a criticism of the constructive part of Kant's transcendental philosophy, Maimon's point is that to understand the relation between thoughts and objects means to understand that the so-called *problem of experience* is both intelligible and insoluble.

In order to prepare the way for the rather technical analysis of Maimon's sometimes quite exotic views, I will present here the general argument of the following chapters. In the next chapter, "Salomon Maimon's Reading of Kant", I analyse Maimon's critical interpretation of a number of Kantian distinctions. These are (1) a distinction between different kinds of judgements (*analytic*, *a priori*, and *synthetic a priori*); (2) a distinction between different kinds of objects (*things in themselves* and *appearances*); and (3) a distinction between different kinds of 'mental states' (*intuitions* and *concepts*). The purpose of this chapter is to give the contemporary reader a relatively easy entrance to the idea of an *Antinomy of Thought.*

In my analysis of Maimon's critique of Kant, it will become evident that it leads to this *Antinomy of Thought* because Maimon argues against the comprehensibility of the fusion of the elements implied by the Kantian distinctions. Thus, Maimon argues that even though Kant is right in claiming that the problem of experience will be solved once we grasp the possibility of *synthetic judgements a priori*, it is impos-

sible for us to comprehend the conjunction of the *synthetic* and the *a priori* in one single judgement. Likewise, Maimon argues that even though he does not accept the Kantian distinction between *appearances* and *things in themselves*, it is nevertheless necessary to distinguish between *objects determined outside of thought* and *objects determined by thought*, and, again, we are unable to comprehend the possibility of the fusion of these different notions (i.e. of their referring to the *same* objects). And, finally, Maimon argues that even though Kant is right to stress the difference between sensibility and understanding, it is impossible for us to comprehend a particular representation as a synthesis of an intuition and a concept. By thus arguing that any account of the relation between thoughts and objects will end up with the *Antinomy of Thought*, Maimon expounds in a powerful way the latent aporetic in Kant's philosophy.

Within the philosophical climate of the time it was only to be expected that Maimon's defense of the inescapability of the *Antinomy of Thought* would take two forms. Given a philosophical world divided by the great controversy between *skepticism* and *dogmatism*, it would only be natural that Maimon turns out as defending on the one hand the value of skepticism and on the other hand the failure of dogmatism. But it is important to stress, that for Maimon the controversy was essentially a conflict about whether an adequate account of the relation between thoughts and objects would, in the final analysis, present a *problem* or a *solution*. Thus, the skeptic holds that an *understanding* of the relation between thoughts and objects amounts to the comprehension of its intrinsically *problematic* nature, whereas the dogmatic holds that an *understanding* of the relation between thoughts and objects consists in a theory that *solves* any problem that could arise with respect to it.

I shall accept the notions of *skepticism* and *dogmatism* as convenient labels for arranging the argument I will reconstruct out of Maimon's often quite chaotic writings. Thus in Chapter Five, "The Value of Skepticism", I shall develop Maimon's reasons for defending the highly paradoxical claim that to understand the relation between thoughts and objects means to understand why any account of it will have an aporetic character. This will involve on the one hand a detailed

analysis of the implications of the distinction between the *Quid juris* and the *Quid facti*, and on the other hand an elaborate exposition of the *Principle of Determinability*.

The point of the distinction between the *Quid juris* and the *Quid facti* is that it reveals that the relation between thoughts and objects might take two forms. Thus, taking for granted that a judgement embodies a relation between thoughts and objects, it will be argued that we have to distinguish between the judgement as containing a *reason why* it expresses a relation between a mind and a specific state of affairs in the world and as containing the *fact that* it expresses such a relation. In addition, it will be argued that (1) it is necessary for any judgement, if it is to embody a relation between thoughts and objects, to take both forms, even though (2) these forms are incompatible with one another.

In order to explain these conflicting implications I shall make use of an analysis of what Maimon calls the *Principle of Determinability*. This *Principle* governs, according to Maimon, all judgements that might properly be said to embody a relation between thoughts and objects. As will become clear however, we, having finite minds, will not be able to construct or encounter judgements that we *know* to be governed by this *Principle*. Although we understand the *Principle of Determinability*, and although we construct and encounter all kinds of judgements, we are unable to evaluate these judgements in the light of this *Principle*. The important implication of this is that it might be the case that many judgements are actually indeed governed by the *Principle of Determinability*, but that we just are unable to know which judgements are so governed.

Therefore we should, according to Maimon, defend a kind of *skepticism*. This does not mean, however, that we have to avow an all-embracing doubt. For Maimon skepticism is not like that. Rather, it amounts to a claim about the conditions of knowledge and, by that, a claim about our inability to satisfy them. More specifically, it amounts to a defense of the *Antinomy of Thought* as an account of our human condition, an account of what it means to have a finite mind, an account we are unable to abandon. Maimon's skepticism is an attempt to explain in terms of our finitude why the structure of our articulations of thinking has an aporetic character.

As against this conclusion it might be objected that any account of whatsoever is unacceptable as long as it implies an unescapable *problem.* That is, the objection runs, we cannot claim to have *understood* something as long as it continues to challenge us with incomprehensibilities. Therefore, if skepticism has the last word, we will necessarily be lost in absolute ignorance. It just cannot be defensible.

This objection introduces the voice of *dogmatism.* I will deal with it in the third chapter on Maimon, "The Failure of Dogmatism", claiming that the only way in which dogmatism could make sense implies itself a profound problem of intelligibility. I will argue that the dogmatic has to hold that, in the final analysis, the notion of an *object determined outside of thought,* and that of an *object determined by thought* refer to the *same* kind of objects, even though this assumed identity of reference is, for us, incomprehensible. The point of this chapter will be to show that to understand why the relation between thoughts and objects is intrinsically incomprehensible, does not imply a *self-refuting* skepticism, even though it does imply that we cannot have a *comprehensive account* of this relation. This will allow me to conclude that an adequate account of the relation between thoughts and objects will have to take the form of a *problem.* Or, to put it this way, I will conclude that the aporetic character of the structure of our articulations of thinking is not something to be *eliminated* but, rather, something to be *understood,* which means to appreciate it for what it is: *a problem.*

CHAPTER FOUR

SALOMON MAIMON'S READING OF KANT

Salomon Maimon was a *Selbstdenker*[1]. This is not to say, however, that he was not deeply influenced by other philosophers, or that he did not take pains to read what others had written. Quite the reverse; it is exactly his way of reading that made him into a *Selbstdenker*. Let me, by way of introducing the spirit of a very remarkable man, quote at length from his autobiographical *Lebensgeschichte*:

> To satisfy my desire for the sciences, there was no other way but to learn foreign languages. But how should I start with that? (...)
>
> Finally, by happy chance, I noticed that some Hebrew books, that were rather bulky, contained several alphabets which meant that the pages were not only printed with Hebrew characters, but that one could have used a second and a third alphabet, which were usually Latin and German characters.
>
> It is true that I had no idea of the printer business. I used to think that books were printed like linen and that each page was printed by one special form.
>
> But I suspected that the characters that stood next to one another signified the same letters, and as I had already heard something about the order of the alphabet of these languages, I supposed that, for example, 'a' which stood next to [the Hebrew 'alpha'] must as well be an Alpha. In this way I learnt the Latin and German scripts.

---

[1] *Logik*, p. 387

By means of a way of deciphering I started to combine German characters into words, but all the time I doubted whether perhaps all my efforts were in vain, when the characters that stood next to the Hebrew ones were altogether something different from these letters, until, by lucky chance, some pages of an old German book fell into my hands.

I started to read them. To my great joy and astonishment I noticed from the relationship that these words corresponded with the words I already learnt. Of course, because of my Jewish language, a lot of words remained incomprehensible, but the context allowed me to understand it almost completely, even though I left these words out.

This way of learning, by means of deciphering, is still the only way for me to grasp and judge the thoughts of others, and I assert that one cannot claim to have understood a book, as long as it remains necessary to present the thoughts of the author, in their definite order and context, by means of the phrases he used himself. This is nothing but a construction of thoughts, and only then one can pride oneself for having understood an author, when his thoughts, which were initially hard to follow, force one to think of these matters oneself, and when it becomes possible to put forward his thoughts, as if they were one's own.[2]

---

[2] Unless stated otherwise, translations are mine. Footnotes will contain the German original. "Um meiner Begierde nach Wissenschaften ein Genüge zu leisten, war kein anderes Mittel übrig, als fremde Sprachen zu lernen. Aber wie sollte ich es damit anfangen? (...)

Endlich kam mir hierin ein glücklicher Zufall zu Hilfe. Ich bemerkte nämlich an einigen hebräischen Büchern, die sehr strakleibig waren, daß sie mehrere Alphabete enthielten und man ihre Bogenanzahl daher nicht bloß mit hebräischen Buchstaben hatte bezeichnen können, sondern im zweiten und dritten Alphabet sich zu diesem Behuf auch anderer Schriftzeichen hatte bedienen müssen, welches gemeiniglich lateinische und deutsche Buchstaben waren.

Nun hatte ich zwar nicht den mindesten Begriff von einer Druckerei. Ich stellte mir gemeinichlich vor, daß Bücher so wie Leinwand gedruckt würden und daß jede Seite durch eine besondre Form abgedruckt würde.

Ich vermutete aber, daß die nebeneinanderstehenden Schriftzeichen einen und ebendenselben Buchstaben bedeuteten, und da ich schon von der Ordnung des Alphabets in diesen Sprachen etwas gehört hatte, so supponierte ich, daß z.B. a, das neben [the hebrew 'alpha'] steht, gleichfalls ein Alpha sein müsse, und lernte auf diese Art nach und nach die lateinische und deutsche Schrift kennen.

Durch eine Art des Dechiffrierens fing ich an, verschiedene deutsche Buchstaben in Wörter zu kombinieren, blieb aber dabei noch immer zweifelhaft, ob nicht meine ganze Mühe vergebens sein würde, indem die neben den hebräischen Buchstaben befindlichen Schriftzeichen ganz etwas anderes als eben dieselben Buchstaben sein könnten, bis mir zum Glück einige Blätter aus einem alten deutschen Buche in die Hande fielen.

Ich fing an zu lesen. Und wie groß war nicht meine Freude und Verwunderung, da ich aus dem Zusammenhang sah, daß die Worte mit denjenigen, die ich schon gelernt hatte, völlig übereinstimmten. Zwar blieben mir nach meiner jüdischen Sprache eine Menge Worte unverständlich, aber aus dem Zusammenhange konnte ich doch auch, mit Weglassung dieser Worte, das Ganze ziemlich fassen.

Maimon read Kant in this way.[3] And Kant appreciated it, as seems to follow from the famous letter Kant wrote to Marcus Herz, in which it is said that

...but a glance soon enabled me to recognize its merits and to see not only that none of my opponents had understood me so well, but that very few could claim so much penetration and subtlety of mind in profound inquiries of this sort, as Mr. Maimon.[4]

From this letter it is clear too that Kant considered Maimon to be an opponent.[5] He was. But it is more important to stress that Maimon, in reading Kant, was set on to something – something Kant was apt to miss (hence Maimon's frequent struggles with and arguments against

---

Die Art, durch Dechiffrieren zu lernen, macht noch jetzt meine eigne Manier aus, die Gedanken anderer zu fassen und zu beurteilen, und ich behaupte, daß man noch gar nicht sagen kann, man verstehe ein Buch, solange man sich gezwungen sieht, die Gedanken des Verfassers in ihrer bestimmten Ordnung und Verbindung mit den von ihm gebrauchten Ausdrücken vorzutragen. Dieses ist ein bloßes Werk des Gedächtnisses, und nur alsdann kann man sich rühmen, einen Autor verstanden zu haben, wenn man durch seine Gedanken, die man anfangs bloß dunkel wahrnimmt, veranlaßt wird, selbst über diese Materie nachzudenken und dieselbe, obschon auf Veranlassung eines andern, selbst hervorzubringen."*Salomon Maimons Lebensgeschichte*, (Insel Verlag 1984), pp. 73-75.

[3] as he did with Maimonides, Leibniz, Aristotle, Spinoza, Reinhold, Aenesidemus, etc.

[4] English translation from F.Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, p. 285 "Allein ein Blick, den ich darauf [on the manuscript of Maimon's *Versuch über die Transscendentalphilosophie*] warf, gab mir bald die Vorzüglichkeit desselben zu erkennen, und daß nicht allein niemand von meinen Gegnern mich und die Hauptfrage so wohl verstanden, sondern daß auch nur wenige zu dergleichen tiefen Untersuchungen so viel Scharfsinn besitzen möchten, als Hr. Maimon."Letter from Kant to Marcus Herz, May 26, 1789. *Kant, Briefwechsel*, ed. Otto Schöndorffer(Leipzig, 1924), pp. 396ff. It might well be, however, that these appreciatory words are but a kind of politeness of Kant towards his friend Marcus Herz, for in a letter to Reinhold (March 28th, 1794) we read "...what however, for example, a *Maimon* actually wants with his *readjustment* of my critical philosophy (a thing Jews like to do, to provide themselves with prominence at the expense of others) [I] did not quite understand, and therefore I have to leave it to others to reprimand him." "...was aber z.B. ein *Maimon* mit seiner *Nachbesserung* der kritischen Philosophie (dergleichen die Juden gerne versuchen, um sich auf fremde Kosten ein Ansehen von Wichtigkeit zu geben) eigentlich wolle, [ich] nie recht habe fassen können und dessen Zurechtweisung ich anderen überlassen muß."*Kant, Briefwechsel*, ed. Otto Schöndorffer(Leipzig, 1924), pp. 662f. I owe this reference to prof.dr. J. Mansfeld.

[5] It is clear as well from this letter that Kant misses the point of Maimon's criticism. See for this same judgement F.C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, pp. 370-371, note 15.

Kant's conception of a critical, transcendental philosophy), something that, nevertheless, was first made discernible by Kant's transformation of the problem of experience, namely, the *intrinsically aporetic character of the structure of our articulations of thinking*. It is in order to clarify this, that I start my analysis of Maimon's defense of the *Antinomy of Thought* with a reconstruction of his reading of Kant.

The theme of this reconstruction will be Kant's transformation of the problem of experience, which according to Maimon reveals a 'consciousness-inherent dualism'. Although Kant succeeded in avoiding the misleading dualism between the human mind and the external world (a dualism that had frustrated both rationalists and empiricists for some time), and succeeded in formulating the problem of empirical knowledge in terms of the inner structure of the mind, he was, according to Maimon, too interested in solutions to be able to grasp the depth of the problem he had uncovered. Kant succeeded as far as he did, because he introduced some new distinctions: (1) a distinction between *appearances* and *things in themselves*; (2) a distinction between certain kinds of judgements, introducing the notion of a *synthetic judgement a priori*; and (3) a distinction *of kind*, instead of *of degree*, between *concepts* and *intuitions*. But his success remains limited to the uncovering of a *problem*. As Maimon argues, a proper understanding of the Kantian distinctions shows that Kant's *transcendental philosophy* is untenable as a *solution* to the problem of experience, because the distinctions we need to *understand* the problem are themselves responsible for its remaining a *problem*.

In the following pages I will develop this Maimonian argument, by taking a closer look at his reading of the Kantian distinctions.

1. Appearances and things in themselves

Up to the present day, the obscure and peculiar notion of a thing in itself is one of the most debated aspects of Kant's philosophy.[6] Imme-

[6] See for a review of the recent attention it received Karl Ameriks "Recent Work on Kant's Theoretical Philosophy" (*American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1982).

diately after the publication of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* it became the focal point of a vivid and extremely interesting debate on the premises of a critical philosophy.[7] Maimon's contribution to this debate was original and important, because he was one of the few to direct all attention to the *distinction* between things in themselves and appearances, rather than just to the puzzling notion of a thing in itself. This allowed him to pass over the received reason for introducing the notion of a thing in itself, and to ask instead for a reason, from within the critical philosophy, for introducing a *distinction* between two kinds of 'intentional' objects.[8] Having found such a reason, Maimon was able to re-interpret it in such a way that there is no need for either of the objects to have a transcendent status.

Kant gave the notion of a thing in itself evidently two functions. On the one hand the notion has a merely negative function, to explain the meaning of Kant's *Transcendental Idealism*. That is, Kant used the notion of a thing in itself negatively, or polemically, as a kind of limiting concept, to clarify his claim that from a transcendental point of view all objects of experience are dependent on the mind.[9] Appearances are not things in themselves and, consequently, we are not allowed to treat them as if they had an existence of their own, nor are we allowed to think that their a priori characteristics are characteristics of things in themselves as well.

Besides this negative function, Kant frequently makes a positive use of the notion of a thing in itself too.[10] This positive use is primarily related to "the tricky question of affection"[11]. Kant maintains that our

---

[7] See for an overview of this debate Ernst Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnisproblem. Dritter Band: Die Nachkantischen Systeme*, (Berlin 1923), pp. 17-126. See also Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason. German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Harvard, 1987).

[8] I will make frequent use, in my interpretation of Maimon, of the notion of an 'intentional' object, even though Maimon himself never uses the term. I will discuss my reasons for this later on, in section 3. Here I use the notion in order to escape the need to use words that favour either a "double-aspect" or a "two-object" view of the distinction. See, for this contemporary distinction Richard E. Aquila, "Things in Themselves and Appearances: Intentionality and Reality in Kant", in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 1979.

[9] *KdrV*, B 311.

[10] See, for example, *KdrV* B xxvi-xxvii, A251-252, B235/A190, *Prolegomena* 314-315.

[11] "die heikle Frage der Affektion"; Henri Lauener, *Hume und Kant* (Bern, 1969), p. 129.

sensibility is a receptive faculty.[12] Its content is the product of two factors: (1) space and time as a priori forms of intuition; and (2) an unknowable factor x, the thing in itself, which somehow is needed to explain the a posteriori character of experience. Or, as Kant says it:

> The faculty of sensible intuition is strictly only a receptivity, a capacity of being affected in a certain manner with representations (...) The non-sensible cause of these representations is completely unknown to us, and cannot therefore be intuited (...) We may, however, entitle the purely intelligible cause of appearances in general the transcendental object, but merely in order to have something corresponding to sensibility viewed as a receptivity.[13]

It is Kant's temptation to explain the passive, 'given' element in intuition by means of an analysis in terms of our sensibility being a receptive faculty. The a posteriori character of all empirical knowledge cannot be explained, according to him, by reference to the spontaneity of our understanding, nor by reference to the forms of intuition, since these only provide for the *possibility* of experience, not for its actuality. We need recourse to some transcendent object, of which we do not know anything, and need not know anything but that it must somehow be responsible for the appearances that we experience.

Even though this Kantian account of our receptivity is fairly cautious, since it does not imply any positive *knowledge* of things in themselves, but only needs to posit them as an unknown "cause" or "ground" in order to be able to explain the a posteriori character of experience, it could not satisfy Kant's early commentators. It was exactly with respect to "the tricky question of affection" that the notion of a thing in itself became the pivotal point of Reinhold's, Jacobi's and Schultze's attempts to understand the coherency of Kant's critical philosophy. Witness Jacobi's famous epigram, this was hard to do: "I

---

[12] *KdrV*, B33/A19

[13] Translation from Norman Kemp Smith "Das sinnliche Anschauungsvermögen ist eigentlich nur eine Rezeptivität, auf gewisse Weise mit Vorstellungen affiziert zu werden (...) Die nichtsinnliche Ursache dieser Vorstellungen ist uns gänzlich unbekannt, und diese können wir daher nicht als Objekt anschauen (...) Indessen können wir die bloß intelligibele Ursache der Erscheinungen überhaupt, das transzendentale Objekt nennen, bloß, damit wir etwas haben, was der Sinnlichkeit als einer Rezeptivität korrespondiert."ibid. B522/A494.

need the assumption of things-in-themselves to enter the Kantian system, but with this assumption it is not possible for me to remain inside it."[14]

Maimon was not convinced of the need to introduce some kind of transcendent object in order to be able to explain the fact that experience has an a posteriori character. More than that, he rejected the whole explanation as a non-explanation. If we think it makes sense to assert that things in themselves cause in us certain sensations, he argues, then it makes sense as well to ask *what* causes these things in themselves to cause these rather than other sensations. And this kind of questioning could go on *ad infinitum*, as is nicely illustrated by the following example:

> This is more or less like the question of the Indian who, when it is said to him that the world rests on a couple of elephants and the elephants on a huge tortoise, asks in his innocence: "And on what, finally, rests the tortoise?".[15]

Maimon's point is not to show that every explanation implies a possible regressus, nor just to show that the explanation under consideration has such an obscure structure that it hardly can count as an explanation at all. No, the point is that there is an illusion involved in thinking that an appearance implies something other than itself that appears. Kant gave occasion for the illusion by speaking sometimes of appearances as of "mere representations".[16] This need not have been misleading by itself, had Kant been very clear about a 'representation' ("Vorstellung") actually being a 'partial presentation' ("Theildarstellung").[17] Now that he wasn't, the illusion[18], Maimon argues, deceived Reinhold as well as Schultze.[19]

---

[14] Jacobi, *Werke* (Leipzig, 1812), II, p. 304. Quoted from (and translated by) Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, p. 124.

[15] "Es hat damit ungefähr die Bewandniß als mit der Frage des Indianers, der, indem man ihm sagte: die Welt steht auf ein paar Elephanten, und die Elephanten auf einer größen Schildkröte, in seiner Unschuld fragte: und worauf endlich die Schildkröte?" Maimon, *Logik*, p. 321.

[16] See, for example, *KdrV*, B591/A563.

[17] Maimon, *Logik*, pp. 241-242.

[18] Compare the following fragments to see in what way Maimon unmasks a Kantian reasoning. "es folgt auch natürlicher Weise aus dem Begriffe einer Erscheinung über-

In itself, this point does not have a positive consequence. After all, Maimon is bound to admit that the status of the 'given' in real thought is still a problem. Nonetheless, now that Maimon made clear that there is no positive use for the notion of a thing in itself with respect to the problem of affection, he is in a position to see whether the *distinction* between appearances and things in themselves, introduced by Kant in order to be able to explain the meaning of his *Transcendental Idealism*, implies more than just a negative use for the notion of a thing in itself.

According to Maimon this is indeed the case. That is, the distinction between appearances and things in themselves is in Kant's philosophy, at least initially, a distinction between two different kinds of 'intentional' objects, i.e. a distinction between two different kinds of objects to which thought might be related. On the one hand, there are appearances, objects whose form *fits* our forms of thought, since it is somehow the product of thought; on the other hand we can imagine objects that have a form that does *not* fit the forms of thought, in which case we have to assume that these objects have a form of their own, a form that is *not* a product of thought. To be sure, this is for Maimon as well as for Kant, a transcendental distinction: it concerns the conditions for thought to have objects to think about. So far, the distinction apparently allows only a negative use for the notion of a thing in itself: it is supposed to refer to objects that cannot be objects for thought. Hence, the notion could not possibly have a positive referential use.

---

haupt: daß ihr etwas entsprechen müsse, was an sich nicht Erscheinung ist, weil Erscheinung nichts für sich selbst, und außer unserer Vorstellungsart sein kann, mithin, wo nicht ein beständiger Zirkel herauskommen soll, das Wort Erscheinung schon eine Beziehung auf Etwas anzeigt, dessen unmittelbare Vorstellung zwar sinnlich ist, was aber an sich selbst, auch ohne diese Beschaffenheit unserer Sinnlichkeit (worauf sich die Form unserer Anschauung gründet), Etwas, d.i. ein von der Sinnlichkeit unabhängiger Gegenstand sein muß." Kant, KdrV , A251-252. "Da wir durch die beständige Wirksamkeit der *reproduktiven Einbildungskraft* uns Objekte beständig *vorstellen*, d.h. weil die Einbildungskraft nicht stark genug ist, *alle* Merkmale der Objekte *darzustellen*, und wir immer die dargestellten Merkmale auf die noch fehlenden und im Objekt selbst befindlichen beziehen, so entstehet bei uns die *Täuschung*, als wären *alle* Objekte unsers Bewußtseyns *Vorstellungen*; und da wir nicht wissen, worauf wir die *ursprünglichen* Objekte weiter beziehen sollen, so fingiren wir *Objekte außer denselben*, gleichsam als deren *Urbilder*, worauf sich jene beziehen." Maimon, *Logik*, p. 242.

[19] *Logik*, p. 319; p. 368.

However, there are two complications. For, if appearances have nothing of their own, if they are nothing but products of thought, then (1) the notion of truth would lose its meaning (thought would equal fantasy—i.e. the "Einbildungskraft" would be our only cognitive faculty), and (2) thought could not have an a posteriori aspect (experience would not exist). These complications, to be sure, are ruled out by Kant, since he clearly states that it is only the form, not the matter, of appearances that is a product of thought. Thus, Kant gave the notion of a thing in itself its positive use: as we have seen things in themselves are held responsible for the provision of the matter of appearances. Seen from this perspective however, Kant's move has something incomprehensibly arbitrary. After all, the consequence of this move is that we are bound to admit that it is only the *form* of appearances that we can think about[20], and that we must accept that objects of thought are some strange amalgam— combinations of an intelligible form and some unintelligible matter. Hence, what have we won by distinguishing appearances from things in themselves, if a shadow of the distinction recurs in one of its terms? Why would we be interested in objects whose form is intelligible, but whose matter is not?

It is at this point that the originality of Maimon with respect to the distinction between things in themselves and appearances is most evident. In his attempt to evade the complications involved, he forces on us a plausible reinterpretation of the initial distinction. If we want to make a distinction between objects that *fit* the forms of thought, and objects that do *not* fit these forms, we are in fact, Maimon argues, looking for a distinction between objects we might regard as being *determined by thought*, and objects we consider to be *determined outside of thought.*[21]

If we accept this interpretation of a distinction between two kinds of 'intentional' objects, we can, Maimon argues, evade the complications mentioned above. For, firstly, we can understand that the notion of truth makes sense in the following way: a representation, which is an *object determined by thought*, might be said to be *true* if it corresponds

---

[20] as Kant realised. See *KdrV*, BXVIII

[21] Maimon, *Logik*, pp. 21-22., and p. 327.

to an object considered to be *determined outside of thought*, if, that is, the determinations of the former object (being 'produced' by thought) are identical to those of the latter one.[22] For example, if I have a representation of a tomato being red, then this representation is *true* if it corresponds to a tomato which, considered to be determined outside of thought, is red as well.

Secondly, we can understand that there is a definitely a posteriori aspect in thought, if there are objects *for thought*, that are *objects determined outside of thought*. Surely, these latter cannot be things in themselves. After all, if they were, then they could not be objects *for thought*, and we would be bound to take recourse to the untenable Kantian suggestions that led immediately, as we saw above, to "the tricky question of affection". No, taking *objects determined outside of thought* to be *transcendent objects* leads nowhere, and what is more, it is not necessary at all. For we are acquainted with a very clear, and obvious kind of *object determined outside of thought*: namely, the objects of intuition.[23] There is a clear sense in which we are confronted by them, without, in any clear sense, being able to assert that thought determined them. Even Kant, of course, has to admit that; as he does, to wit, since for Kant thought only determines the *form* of appearances.

The distinction between an *object determined by thought* and an *object determined outside of thought* is for a proper understanding of Maimon's defense of the *Antinomy of Thought* of utmost importance. Therefore I will have to say, in this as well as in subsequent chapters, much more about it. Here, however, I will just clarify the connotation of the addition *'outside of thought'*, in order to be able to indicate in what way Maimon speaks of objects of intuition as of 'objects determined outside of thought'. Something is determined *outside of thought* if it is something that is (1) present to *consciousness*, (2) without being determined *by thought*; that is, if it might properly be regarded as an *intentional object*, without thereby implying that it is determined according to concepts, i.e. rules of the understanding. This means, to be

---

[22] ibid. p. 18.
[23] ibid. p. 327.

sure, that *objects determined outside of thought* are consciousness-inherent: typically a manifold taken together in consciousness, without thereby implying that the 'act' of consciousness was governed by rules of the understanding.[24] By thus using the distinction between 'consciousness' and 'thought' to give meaning to a difference between two kinds of 'intentional' ('consciousness-inherent') objects, Maimon is able to save the *function* of the Kantian distinction between appearances and things in themselves, without committing himself to the introduction of *transcendent objects* —objects the mind by definition cannot cope with.

It is important of course to realize that Maimon is still confronted with the problem of the 'given', but, seen from his perspective, this is not really the problem of affection. The real problem in an account of thinking is not so much *how* it is possible that there are objects present to consciousness that are nevertheless *not* determined by thought. As we will see, according to Maimon, all real objects[25] are. No, the big problem here is how it is possible, if it is possible at all, to *determine by thought* objects that are considered to be already *determined outside of thought*.

It is this problem that Maimon discovered in reading Kant. It is a manifestation of the *Antinomy of Thought*[26]. Thought needs, in order to be able to think of reality, at the same time objects *determined outside of thought* as well as objects *determined by thought*, and, what is more, in any concrete act of thinking these different kinds of objects must be thought to be identical.

---

[24] For Maimon the distinction between 'consciousness' and 'thought' is very important. I will have to say more about that below. See, Maimon, *Logik*, pp. 21-25; p. 251.

[25] In Maimon's writings the notion of a real object is a complicated one. On the one hand he uses it to refer to *actual* objects of experience, and on the other hand he uses it to refer to objects that are completely determined. This latter definition is more basic than the former one. For it is the case that every actual object of experience is completely determined but it is not the case that every object that is completely determined is an actual object of experience. After all, it might be an object that is created by means of a thought of the infinite mind. As far as the objects of our finite mind are concerned, the class of objects that is completely determined is equivalent to the class of actual objects of experience. Cf. below p. 80; pp.84f; pp. 140-146.

[26] Maimon, *Wörterbuch*, p. 162.

There are two more ways to present Maimon's discovery of the *Antinomy of Thought* in terms of his reading of Kant. One is by way of Maimon's criticism of Kant's treatment of the question "Are synthetic judgements a priori possible?"; the other by way of Maimon's criticism of Kant's distinction between concepts and intuitions. I will turn first to the notion of a *synthetic judgement a priori.*

2. Synthetic judgements a priori

The introduction of the notion of a *synthetic judgement a priori* is, at least in a historical sense, one of Kant's greatest contributions to philosophy. It enabled him to accomplish a radical transformation of the problem of experience. Instead of taking this problem as being concerned with the rather incomprehensible relation between the human mind and the external world, Kant made it possible to tackle it by focusing on certain distinctions between different types of judgements. Thus Kant was able to sidestep the unpromising task of having to bridge the gap between the human mind and the external world. The focus shifted, in other words, from a very problematic *relational* approach to a very promising *semantic* approach.[27] What makes experience (i.e. empirical knowledge) differ from perception (mere opinion) now no longer needs to be regarded as some incomprehensible relation between the mind and the world, but can be taken as a special feature of a certain type of judgement.

This is a radically new approach, made possible by Kant's *Copernican revolution*, which opened up the possibility to treat features of objects as the contents of judgements. As we shall see, this shift of attention was fully explored by Maimon. In a critical vein, though, for

---

[27] These labels stem from Richard Aquila, *Representational Mind* (Bloomington, 1983), pp. 36ff. It is important to admit that these labels ask for a very careful use. They are not intended to make Kant into a philosopher who made a 'linguistic turn'. I use them just to cover Kant's stress upon the inner functions of the components of a conscious state, as being a mental as well as a linguistic state. That is, 'semantic' here does not contrast with 'psychological', but with 'relational'—i.e. the label is meant to underline Kant's renouncement of any attempt to understand meaning as the product of a relation between the mind and the external world.

Maimon was convinced that Kant, notwithstanding his having 'invented' the new approach, seriously failed to do justice to the differences between analytic, synthetic, a priori and a posteriori judgements.

In order to understand the question that is central to Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*: "How are synthetic judgements a priori possible?"[28], it is necessary, Maimon argues, to differentiate between the following questions:

1. How are analytic judgements a priori possible?
2. How are synthetic judgements as judgements in themselves, without any relation to the empirical objects which fall under them, in respect to which they are a priori, possible?
3. How are synthetic judgements a priori in mathematics possible?
4. How are synthetic judgements a priori in empirical science possi ble?[29]

An analysis of the first two questions will show (1) why Maimon claims that the only way to understand the actual existence of *synthetic judgements a priori* is to accept the incompleteness, the finitude, of our understanding; and (2) why there is a problem of method related to *how* to answer these questions. An analysis of the last two questions will subsequently clarify why Maimon claims that the last question cannot be answered at all.

The point of the first question is nothing but to set the scene for grasping the differences between the other three questions. Its purport is, according to Maimon, to ask for the possibility of *knowing* that certain *determinations* ("Bestimmungen") belong to *every* determinate object, *before* knowing any specific determinations of those objects. And the answer to this question stems from the notion of an *object at*

---

28 "Wie sind synthetische Urteile a priori möglich?"Kant, *KdrV* , B19.

29 "1. Wie sind analytische Urtheile a priori möglich?
2. Wie sind synthetische Urtheile als Urtheile an sich, ohne Beziehung auf die darunter zu subsumirenden empirischen Objekte, in ansehung welcher sie a priori sind, möglich?
3. Wie sind synthetische Urtheile a priori in der Mathematik möglich?
4. Wie sind synthetische Urtheile a priori in der Naturwissenschaft möglich?" Maimon, *Logik*, pp. 412-418

all ("Objekt überhaupt"), which is dependent upon the logical Principle of Non-Contradiction, and its relative, the Principle of Identity.

> we have to predicate of determinate objects, prior to any knowledge of their specific determinations, what we have to predicate of an *object at all*.[30]

An analytic judgement a priori, thus, represents a piece of knowledge: it presents a relation between certain determinations and certain objects, or, more precisely, between a certain determination ("Bestimmung") and a certain 'determinable' ("Bestimmbares"), by means of a semantical entity relating a predicate to a subject. The knowledge contained by an analytic judgement a priori is, of course, rather small; it means nothing more than that the subject it is about is an object at all—a thing identified, i.e. nothing but a 'determinable' identical with its determination.[31]

The important thing to notice here is the way in which Maimon analyses the separate parts of the notion of an analytic judgement a priori. "Judgement" stands for some piece of knowledge, that is, for *having determined some object in some way* (I might add that there is for Maimon, as for Kant and their contemporaries, no interesting difference between a piece of knowledge considered as a linguistic entity, and a piece of knowledge considered as a specific mental state[32]). "A priori" stands for having the specific knowledge that is presented by a judgement a priori, *before*, that is, *prior to* having any other knowledge of the specific object it is knowledge of. Thus, if there is with regard to a certain object some a priori knowledge of it, then this means that we have to determine the object in some specific way (namely, the way presented by the judgement a priori) *before* being able to determine this object in another way. "Analytic", finally, stands for having the specific knowledge that is presented by an analytic judgement *implicit* in any

---

[30] "wir müssen von bestimmten Objekten, vor der Erkenntniß ihrer besondern Bestimmungen, dasjenige prädiciren, was wir von einem *Objekt überhaupt* prädiciren müssen."ibid. p. 415.

[31] For example, A=A.

[32] This, for analytical philosophers, almost natural distinction stems from Frege's fear for a psychologism. See Stanley Rosen, *The Limits of Analysis*, pp. 4-26.

other knowledge of the object. Thus, if there is with regard to a certain object some analytic knowledge of it, then this means that a certain determination of the object (namely, the one presented in the analytic judgement) is *implied* by any other determination of the object involved.

The difference between a priori and analytic is crucial. It reflects the specific position of a thinking subject in the course of determining an object. If certain determinations belong to a specific object in such a way that one has to start a process of determining that object by using these determinations, then judgements which attribute these determinations to the object in question *are*, in the final analysis, both analytic and a priori . After all, in order to be able to determine this specific object in *whatever* way, one has to start first with determining the object by means of the determinations under consideration. Hence, the judgements containing them are *a priori*. They are *analytic* too, for any determination that can be attributed to the object, implies a prior determination of the object by means of the mentioned determinations. Let me illustrate this. The determination "having three sides" is, according to Maimon, part of the concept (the rule of production) of a triangle. Therefore it belongs to any knowledge of a triangle in such a way that any process of determining a triangle has to start with a judgement stating that it is a spatial shape having three sides. It does not make sense, for example, to determine the colour of the triangle first; no, the determination "having three sides" precedes all other determinations of whatever triangle. Hence, the judgement containing this determination is a priori. It is analytic too, for any determination of a triangle implies that the object, since it is a triangle, is determined by the determination "having three sides".

From the point of view of a thinking subject, however, there can be a difference between *a priori* and *analytic* judgements; not only qua connotation (such a difference is, after all, implied by the given analysis), but precisely qua denotation. For it might be necessary for some thinking subject to start with some specific determination of some specific object. A judgement that attributes this determination to this object, consequently, is a priori. But if there do not follow more determinations of the object under consideration, then it makes no sense to

say that the judgement that attributed the specific determination to this object is analytic, since the determination under consideration is not implied by any other determination of the specific object. Such a judgement is, therefore, a *synthetic judgement a priori*, but it can only be such a judgement if the mind of the thinking subject involved is *limited, incomplete*, if, that is, the thinking subject is unable to proceed the determination of the object under consideration.[33]

This analysis of the notion of an analytic judgement a priori, leading to the conclusion that a judgement can only be a priori *and* synthetic for a *limited* mind in the midst of determining its objects, has as a result that the specific position of the thinking subject with respect to the judgements under consideration is of great importance to the character of these judgements. And this, as Maimon points out, makes it necessary to differentiate between the three questions, quoted above, that deal with *synthetic judgements a priori*.

The first of these, to repeat,

> How are synthetic judgements as judgements in themselves, without any relation to the empirical objects which fall under them, in respect to which they are a priori, possible?

is mainly a rhetorical question. Maimon wants to make clear that, in the final analysis, it is hard to make sense of the conjunction of 'synthetic' and 'a priori'. After all, 'a priori' implies that the determination of the object presented by the judgement in question precedes any other determination of the object. Strictly speaking, this entails that any other determination of the object presupposes this 'a priori' determination. However, 'synthetic' does imply that the judgement involved is *not* analytic, that is, that it is *not* the case that *any* determination of the object under consideration implies this specific determination; that, to put it differently, there is no *ground* for accepting the *necessity* of the determination in question. Stated thus, a *synthetic judgement a priori* does not so much express a special kind of *knowledge*, but expresses much more a strange kind of *perplexity*: the existence of synthetic judgements a priori reveals the incompleteness of our minds. It reveals

---

[33] Maimon, *Transscendentalphilosophie*, pp. 61-62.

that we do not know enough of things to understand them. In other words, were we to understand the *possibility* of synthetic judgements a priori, we would be bound to assert that they actually *cannot be possible at all*. So if there are, nonetheless, or at least, if there appear to be *synthetic judgements a priori*, then this only means that we are sometimes forced to accept that certain objects are determined in a specific way, without being able to understand the sense of, or the reason for, this determination.[34] This implies that we should take notice of the difference between the *fact that* ("Faktum") of a synthetic judgement a priori and the *reason why* ("Grund") for such a judgement. This difference is of fundamental importance for a proper understanding of Maimon's philosophy; it is the difference he usually refers to as the difference between the *"Quid facti?"* and the *"Quid juris?"*.[35] In the next chapter, I shall present a detailed analysis of its implications. Here it will suffice to point out that the difference between the last two questions concerning synthetic judgements a priori, reflect the methodological consequences of the difference between the *"Quid facti"* and the *"Quid juris"*.

In these last two questions reference is made to specific, determinate objects, which must, at least in asking the question, be treated as if their determinate character is not relevant. In order to be able to understand this, Maimon gives the following reformulation:

> How is it possible for us to attach the predicates which are given to us only by determinate objects, necessarily to these very objects, as if it was the case that these predicates belonged to these objects not because of their being determinate objects, but because of the form of cognition related to an object at all.[36]

This reformulation, Maimon stresses, is only applicable to the question "How are synthetic judgements a priori in mathematics possible?" According to Maimon, realizing synthetic judgements a priori in ma-

---

[34] Maimon, *Transscendentalphilosophie*, pp. 61-62.

[35] See for example Maimon, *Transscendentalphilosophie*, p. 9; *Logik*, p. 192; ibid. pp. 419-421.

[36] "Wie können wir die erst durch die bestimmten Objekte gegebenen Prädikate, von denselben auf eine nothwendige Art, als würden sie nicht erst durch diese bestimmten Objekte, sondern durch die Form der Erkenntniß, in Beziehung auf ein Objekt überhaupt bestimmt, prädiciren?" Maimon, *Logik*, p. 415.

thematics goes like this. One encounters a determinate mathematical object, say a triangle, and one notices that one of its determinations is that the sum total of its angles equals two right angles. The next step is to try to imagine whether this determination belongs necessarily to the object in question. One tries to discover whether, in order to be able to say anything at all about a triangle (i.e. being able to determine it in whatever way), it is necessary to imagine the triangle as being determined by the determination 'the sum total of the angles equals two right angles'. This, indeed, seems to be the case, and we can discover this by *constructing* the object.

Since mathematical concepts entail the complete rule for 'constructing' their object, Maimon claims, it is possible to *construct* mathematical objects.[37] However, such a construction shows us just the *fact that* it is the case that the sum total of the angles of a triangle equals two right angles, not the *reason why* this is the case. And that is exactly the very condition needed to realize that the judgement "The sum total of the angles of a triangle equals two right angles" is a *synthetic judgement a priori*. For, would the construction reveal not only the *fact that* the judgement is a priori true, but also the *reason why* it is so, then the judgement would not be *synthetic*, but *analytic*, as is the case with "A triangle has three sides". The difference between this latter judgement and the former one lies, according to Maimon, in the fact that the rule of the understanding we use in constructing a triangle (i.e. the concept of a triangle) contains the latter determination, but not the former one.[38]

Apart from the fact that a *construction* shows us, according to Maimon, just the fact that some a priori judgement is synthetic, but not the *reason why*, the above analysis reveals another interesting aspect of the way we arrive, in mathematics, at synthetic judgements a priori. This lies in the *fact that* synthetic judgements a priori are somehow 'derived' (though of course not logically) from two judgements that are definitely *a posteriori*. On the one hand there must first be some judgement that gives us, a posteriori, both the subject and the predicate of the synthetic judgement a priori. One first has to encounter a ma-

---

[37] ibid. pp. 414-415

[38] According to Maimon the concept of a triangle is "a space bound by three lines". *Logik*, p. 24.

thematical object—or, what, for Kant and Maimon, comes to the same thing, one first has to make a synthetic judgement a posteriori, in order to have disposal of the 'determinable' and the determination: "The sum total of *this* triangle equals two right angles". To be sure, Kant was from the very beginning of his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, well aware of this need for an initial synthetic judgement a posteriori.[39] On the other hand, we need a second synthetic judgement a posteriori—we must *construct* a triangle, out of nothing, making its essence[40] intuitive, as Maimon says.[41] This, again, means making a synthetic judgement a posteriori; a judgement about a concrete object that has been constructed according to a concept (i.e. according to a rule of the understanding): "The sum total of *this constructed* triangle equals two right angles".

Maimon claims that we can, at least in mathematics, derive a *synthetic judgement a priori* from these two *synthetic judgements a posteriori*, because the second judgement a posteriori is a *direct consequence* of an a priori *activity* of the understanding. This is so, according to him, because mathematical concepts entail the complete rule for 'constructing' their object.[42] In order to make clear why there is, according to Maimon, a very significant difference between mathematics and physics, I will just accept this claim.

The structure of the answer to the question "How are synthetic judgements a priori in mathematics possible?" makes clear that the last question, "How are synthetic judgements a priori in empirical science possible?", cannot have the same purport as this former one. For there

---

[39] As is clear from the very first sentence of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*: "It is beyond doubt that all knowledge begins with experience.", "Daß alle unsere Erkenntnis mit der Erfahrung anfange, daran ist gar kein Zweifel" *KdrV*, B1. And just a few sentences later: "Even though all knowledge begins *with* experience, this does not mean that it all originates *from* experience.", "Wenn aber gleich alle unsere Erkenntnis *mit* der Erfahrung anhebt, so entspringt sie darum doch nicht eben alle *aus* der Erfahrung".

[40] Its "Differenzial" (*Transscendentalphilosophie*, p. 395), a pure quality, of which every concrete instantiation is an "Integral". I will not discuss Maimon's obscure 'doctrine of differentials', since it is not relevant to the systematic problem of this thesis, but see, for a very good discussion of this doctrine: Samuel Hugo Bergman, *The Philosophy of Solomon Maimon* (Jerusalem, 1967), pp. 59-68.

[41] Maimon, *Transscendentalphilosophie*, p. 58

[42] Cf. *Logik*, pp. 116-118, where Maimon argues that mathematical knowledge is in a narrow sense *a posteriori* but in a broad sense *a priori*.

is no answer of the same kind in physics as there is in mathematics, since empirical objects surely cannot be constructed by the understanding according to a rule. This means that the second judgement a posteriori, that is needed to be in a position to derive a synthetic judgement a priori, is *not* a *direct consequence* of an a priori activity of the understanding. No, as is clear, this second judgement a posteriori can only be given by experience. Hence, it is at most a *direct consequence* of something that is a posteriori. Taking this last question as being on a par with the former one, as Kant did, weakens the strength of a critical philosophy in advance, according to Maimon.[43]

A better interpretation of the last question, therefore, Maimon claims, is the following:

> Because of what reasons do we relate synthetic judgements a priori to empirical objects, without determining on which?[44]

and the answer is well-known:

> this is because of the *possibility of experience*, as it is the case that *empirical objects* can only be *objects of possible experience* by means of these judgements.[45]

An analysis of this Kantian answer, Maimon stresses, will reveal the importance of the difference between mathematics and physics. The first point to notice is that the Kantian answer forces us to make a distinction between a *material* and a *formal* reality, or, in other words, between the *actuality* of an object, and its mere *possibility*. Constructing an object, as we can do in mathematics, provides an answer that is based on the *material reality* of the object the synthetic judgement a priori is about. We derive the a priori character of the judgement from the *actuality* of the object we constructed. Ensuring the possibility of experience, however, as we do in physics, just provides an answer that

---

43 Maimon, *Logik*, p. 416.

44 "Aus welchem Grunde beziehen wir synthetische Urtheile a priori auf empirische Objekte überhaupt, ohne zu bestimmen, auf welche?", ibid.

45 "(...)dieses geschieht aus dem Grunde der *Möglichkeit der Erfahrung*, weil *empyrische Objekte* nur durch diese Urtheile *Gegenstände möglicher Erfahrung* seyn können.", ibid.

is based on the *formal reality* of the object. The Kantian answer assumes that it must be possible to derive the a priori character of a synthetic judgement in physics from the mere *possibility* of the object it is about. If this is indeed what the Kantian answer is assuming, then the *actual* existence of synthetic judgements a priori *in mathematics* implies by the same token their *material, real application*, whereas the *actual* existence of synthetic judgements a priori *in physics* implies, by that very fact, nothing but their *formal, possible applicability*.[46]

This crucial distinction between synthetic judgements a priori in mathematics and in physics might also be stated in another way, using notions I did already introduce. That is, this distinction clarifies the real importance of the distinction between the *"Quid juris"* and the *"Quid facti"*. To recall, the first question asks for the *reason why* certain synthetic judgements a priori are true of certain objects; the latter one asks for the *very fact that* certain synthetic judgements a priori are true of certain objects. As we saw, Maimon argues that we get, in mathematics, decisive answers to this last question, but not really satisfactory answers to the former one. We do not know the *reason why* the sum total of the angles of a triangle equals two right angles, but we know, *in fact, that* the judgement "The sum total of the angles of a triangle equals two right angles" is a synthetic judgement that is a priori true of all triangles. We know this fact, because we *cannot* construct a triangle, following the rule of the understanding for its 'construction', *without* having to construct it in such a way that the sum total of its angles equals two right angles. All of this we saw above. But now we can see that in physics the situation is exactly the reverse. In physics we get an answer to the *"Quid juris"*, but not to the *"Quid facti"*. Thus Maimon argues that the Kantian answer to the question concerning synthetic judgements a priori in physics gives us only an answer to the former question: experience (meaning, in the technical Kantian sense, empirical knowledge) would not be *possible at all* if we could not apply synthetic judgements a priori in physics. So Kant makes it clear, Maimon is willing to admit, that we are *justified* in applying synthetic judge-

---

[46] *Logik*, pp. 325-331.

ments a priori to empirical objects.[47] But whether we *in fact* do apply synthetic judgements a priori to empirical objects remains a question. After all, the actual existence of synthetic judgements a priori implies, in physics, nothing but their *formal, possible applicability*, i.e. not their *material, real application*. This is so because, as Hume argued, the *apparent fact that* we have experience (the fact which is the starting-point of Kant's Transcendental Deduction), i.e. that we are not just engaged in mere *perception*, but actually have empirical *knowledge*, can be explained in terms of a psychological illusion.

Let me give Maimon's example. It might be necessary, in order to make experience possible at all, to accept that everything stands in some causal relation. If so, the possibility of experience would require a synthetic judgement a priori like "All objects of experience stand in causal relations". However, this judgement never tells us anything about whatever pair of concrete objects that *in fact* stand in a causal relation to one another, and, as a consequence, we never know whether we *experience* causal relations or just *perceive* what seem to be causal relations. Thus, we never know whether there is in fact a causal relation between the fire and the warmth of a stone, one of Maimon's favourite examples goes, or whether we just imagine such a relation in perception.[48]

---

[47] Maimon, *Logik*, p. 419.

[48] See for a good account (although it is, characteristically, formulated with much difficulty) of this difference between Maimon and Kant, *Logik*, pp. 328-329: "Do we have *pure knowledge* related to *empirical objects* in an absolutely a priori way? In Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* this question is answered affirmatively, and instead of any proof reference is made to its *common use* as if it were a *fact*. We say, for example, that the *fire* heats the stone, i.e. fire is the *cause* of the *heating* of the stone, and so forth, and in this way we look for the *cause* of every *appearance*. This implies the presupposition of the *concept* of *cause* and of the *principle* that every appearance has a cause. Our *Critique of the Faculties of Cognition* answers the question negatively, by showing that this so called *fact* rests on an *illusion* of the imagination. This *concept* and this *principle* might well be a priori, but they have no other *sense* but the one that is given to them by their *actual use*, and they have no other actual *use* than with respect to a priori *objects*. *Substance*, for example, means according to our *Critique* not that what *exists in itself*, whereas *accident* is what changes and what cannot *exist in itself* but only as an *accident* of the *substance*. According to our *Critique*, *substance* is what can be an *object of consciousness* in itself, whereas *accident* cannot in itself, but only in combination with the former be an *object of consciousness*; and so on. This is the entire *foundation of my skepticism*."; "Haben wir *reine Erkenntnisse*, die sich auf *empyrische Objekte* absolut a priori beziehen? Diese Frage wird in der *Kantischen Kritik der reinen Vernunft* mit *Ja*

This is, clearly, Hume all over again, but as Maimon stresses more than once, the purport of his skepticism is to reformulate Hume in terms of Kant's critical philosophy in order to show that Kant did not succeed in refuting Hume's skepticism. Kant's Transcendental Deduction is *informing* about the preconditions of knowledge[49] and it provides a convincing answer to the *"Quid juris"*, Maimon is willing to accept, but in order for it to provide a convincing answer to the *"Quid facti"* too, Kant had to take refuge in an unwarranted premise. This is the premise that we have experience (that we do sometimes make true judgements about empirical objects), where 'experience' is understood as the *universal and necessary* connection of certain determinations and certain 'determinables'; not merely a contingent, though constant connection. This premise must be doubted, according to Maimon, which does not, however, imply that we do *not* have experience. No, we just don't know whether we have or not, and this we will never know, which reminds us again of our finite understanding.

Let me now that I have finished my analysis of Maimon's criticism of Kant's treatment of synthetic judgements a priori, formulate the following conclusions. Firstly, we have seen that, according to Maimon, all judgements that are a priori, are also analytic. It is only possible for them to seem synthetic with respect to a finite mind engaged in the project of determining a possible object of thought.

---

beantwortet, und statt aller Beweise wird ihr gemeiner *Gebrauch* als *Faktum* angeführt. Wir sagen z.B. das *Feuer* erwärmt den Stein, d.h. das Feuer ist *Ursache* von der *Erwärmung* des Steins u.d.gl. und wir suchen auf gleiche Art zu jeder *Erscheinung* ihre *Ursache*. Dieses setzt also den *Begriff* von *Ursache* und den *Grundsatz*: jede Erscheinung muß eine Ursache haben, voraus. Unsere *Kritik des Erkenntnißvermögens* aber beantwortet diese Frage mit *Nein*, indem sie zeigt, daß dieses vermeinte *Faktum* auf einer *Täuschung* der Einbildungskraft beruht. Diese *Begriffe* und *Grundsätze* sind allerdings a priori, sie haben aber keine andere *Bedeutung*, als die ihnen in ihrem *reellen Gebrauche* zukommt, und haben keinen andern reellen *Gebrauch*, als von *Objekten* a priori. *Substanz* z.B. heißt unser *Kritik* zufolge nicht das was *an sich existirend* bleibt, während daß die *Akzidens* wechselt, und was nicht *an sich*, sondern als *Akzidens* der *Substanz existiren* kann, sondern das was ein *Gegenstand des Bewußtseyns* an sich, und das was nicht an sich, sondern in Verbindung mit jenem ein *Gegenstand des Bewußtseyns* seyn kann; u.s.w. Dieses ist das ganze *Fundament unseres Skeptizismus.*"

[49] It is interesting to notice that this line of evaluation is recently put forward again. See Karl Ameriks, "Kant's Transcendental Deduction as a Regressive Argument", in *Kantstudien*, 1978.

Secondly, we must realize with respect to judgements that seem to be synthetic *and* a priori to us—as is possible, since our minds are finite—, that there is a distinction between the *fact that* they apply to certain objects, and the *reason why* they do so apply. This distinction is important, because the finitude of our minds consists exactly in that we *cannot know*, with respect to whatever synthetic judgement a priori, the answers to *both* the *"Quid facti"* and the *"Quid juris"*. For, should we, then the judgement in question could not be *both* synthetic *and* a priori, but would reveal its real character: *analytic a priori*. Maimon presented the purport of this distinction by distinguishing between mathematical and empirical objects, but the point is not really dependent upon his being right about mathematical objects.[50] The point can sufficiently be made with reference to physics alone, since it is enough to show that we can arrive at an answer to the *"Quid juris"* with respect to the applicability of synthetic judgements a priori to empirical objects, but not at an answer to the *"Quid facti"* . After all, the only point really to be made, is that a judgement is a priori *and* analytic as soon as we know *both* the *reason why and* the *fact that* it applies to the objects it is about.

These conclusions contain, from another perspective, a second formulation of the *Antinomy of Thought*. Determining an object *by thought* is only possible if one possesses the concept of the object, the rule of its determination. If one possesses this rule, one knows the reason for all specific determinations of the object and, as a consequence, all judgements one makes about the object will be analytic. Human understanding, however, is finite. We don't have concepts, at least not if conceived as the *complete* rules of the determination of objects. We sometimes have, indeed, according to Maimon, a rule for *constructing* an object, but we need an *intuition* of the constructed object in order to know which specific determinations of the object follow from this rule. That is, real thought implies, for us, both a

---

[50] It can, for example, be doubted whether *induction* is implied by the derivation of the a priori character of a judgement out of a synthetic judgement a posteriori that concerns a *constructed* object, even if it is said that this judgement a posteriori is a *direct consequence* of an a priori activity of the mind. Doubts arise as well, of course, from the non-Euclidean kinds of mathematics Maimon was not yet acquianted with.

determination of the object according to a rule of the understanding (according to a concept) and a determination of the object from *outside of thought*, which is given to the understanding by *intuition*.[51] The former determination is always *underdetermined* —a rule not to *think* the object, but to *construct* it, or, in physics, even merely to realize the *possibility* of experiencing it. Therefore we need the latter determination, because an object can only be real if it is completely determined.[52] But this latter determination is merely *sensible*, not intelligible. We need both of these determinations but, since they stem from altogether distinct cognitive faculties, we will never attain, as *finite minds*, the final fit between, or, better, the actual identity of, a determination by a concept, i.e. according to a rule of the understanding, and a determination given by intuition from *outside of thought*. To make this sweeping claim plausible, it will be necessary to analyse in some detail Maimon's radical interpretation of Kant's distinction between concepts and intuitions. This analysis will provide a third way to approach Maimon's account of the *Antinomy of Thought* as emerging out of his reading of Kant.

3. Concepts and intuitions

Kant's move beyond his predecessors can be formulated in terms of his stress on a distinction *of kind* rather than *of degree* between concepts and intuitions. Both empiricists like Locke and rationalists like Leibniz struggled with an unbridgeable gap between the human mind and the external world, as well as with an unclear Scholastic distinction between two ways to bridge that gap: an intellectual and a sensible way. Because of this background both empiricists and rationalists tended to think of understanding and sensibility as on a par, as different ways to do the same thing: establishing a connection between mind and world.[53] It might be argued that Kant opened up the possibility of a

---

[51] Obviously we need remember the results of the previous section (concerning the distinction between thought and consciousness): 'outside of thought' does not mean 'from outside our mind'.

[52] See footnote 25, above, p. 66.

functional approach to concepts and intuitions, instead of the unfruitful *relational* approach, by stressing the fundamentally different *functions* of concepts and intuitions in acquiring knowledge.[54]

But, again, despite the clarity of the *relevance* of a distinction between the functions of concepts and intuitions, there are serious difficulties with respect to Kant's own account of (1) the precise meaning of the distinction, and (2) the way in which concepts and intuitions are thought to come together. Perhaps these difficulties are inescapable consequences of the revolution Kant brought about, or, as Dieter Henrich observes:

> The theory and its new language remain outside of the light that they shed on the questions they try to answer.[55]

Unfortunately the Kantian reaction took little notice of the import of Maimon's specific disagreements with Kant on the distinction in question. The most important feature of Maimon's view is that, according to him, concepts and intuitions, both being modes of consciousness, *differ* from one another because they *entail* different *kinds* of *intentional objects*; and not because they provide different aspects of one and the same object (even though they may, in the final analysis), nor because they are products of different cognitive faculties (even though in fact they are).

According to Maimon, we need a much more careful account of the 'givenness' of our intuitions than the one Kant provides. We need an account that should enable us to escape the problematic threat of a transcendental realism, an account, in other words, that is not based upon the questionable idea that our sensibility is a *receptive* faculty.

---

[53] See for a good discussion of Kant's move beyond his predecessors with respect to 'understanding' and 'sensibility': Jonathan Bennett, *Kant's Dialectic*, (Cambridge, 1974), chapter 1.

[54] See, for example, Cassirer's interpretation of Kant's transformation of philosophy; this is especially clear in the introduction to his own *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*. (Berlin, 1923-1929). See also, of contemporary scholars, the interpretation of Richard Aquila in his *Representational Mind* (Bloomington, 1983), chapters 1 and 2.

[55] "Die Theorie und ihre neue Sprache stehen nicht in dem Licht, das von ihnen auf die Fragen fällt, die sie beantworten wollen."Dieter Henrich, *Identität und Objektivität* (Heidelberg, 1976), p. 9.

What Maimon tries to accomplish is to think about our passivity without thereby having to think about our *receptivity*. He argues that we have said enough if we have ascertained that there is nothing we did, at least not consciously, to get intuitions. Our *being* conscious just implies our *having* intuitions, and all we really have said, if we say that intuitions are 'given', is that we do not know at all how we have got them. We just *happen to have* them; that is, we did not construct them, and we have no clue whatsoever concerning who or what did construct them. To put it differently, our intuitions are intuitions just because they are mental states we are in, without having the faintest idea about what cause realized this state of mind we are in.

Of course, this is only a negative characterization, but the crucial point is that it allows Maimon to dissociate our intuitions radically from our 'receptivity'. That intuitions are 'given' does not mean to say anything at all about their origin; it only says something about the way our cognitive faculty is related to them. With respect to intuitions our conscious mode of being is *passive*: we just *happen to have* them. That, precisely, is part of our being conscious at all.

But now, if intuitions do not have a causal relation with their objects, or, more precisely, if we do not know whether they have such a relation, and, consequently, if their having such a relation or not does *not* change in any way their *meaning*, how, then, should we understand the relation they have with their object? And, what comes together, if *concepts* are mental states *we* create, or introduce (as rules of the understanding) as soon as we *think*, then in what way do they relate to their objects? These are important questions raising the point that, in order to be able to approach the problem of experience in terms of the inner dynamics of consciousness, that is, in order to be able to understand concepts and intuitions as *functions* of thought, and not as *connections* between the human mind and the external world, it might well be necessary to make use of the idea of an *intentional object*.[56]

---

[56] This point has recently been put forward by Richard Aquila, in his interpretation of Kant's theory of knowledge. See his *Representational Mind* (Bloomington, 1983), chapters 1 and 2. In his "Things in Themselves and Appearances: Intentionality and Reality in Kant", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 1979, he first introduced the basic ideas of his interpretation.

Maimon realized this point without using the term "intentional". In a very compact passage of his *Logik*, a passage that almost sounds like a list of definitions, Maimon provides the material for answering the questions formulated above. Let me quote it in full:

> The determinate consciousness of each element *in itself* of a manifold that has to be joined, apart from this conjunction by thought, is an *intuition*. The consciousness of each of these to be joined elements, not just *in itself*, but as well as an element of this manifold that has to be joined, is a *representation* of this to be joined manifold. The consciousness of each element, not just as an element of *this*, but of *several* to be joined manifolds, is a *concept* of this manifold. The specific *determination* of an intuition is an *object of intuition*. The in itself determinate, in a unity of consciousness to be joined manifold is an *object of thought*. The manifold, joined in a unity of consciousness, is an *object of representation*. The several objects, represented by means of a common concept, are together the *objects of a concept*.[57]

The point here is not so much that Maimon disagrees with Kant (for on certain interpretations of Kant's view, Kant could subscribe to the quoted assertions), but rather that he stresses that intuitions and concepts are mental states, modes of consciousness. This means, and this is clear from the last sentences, that the objects of intuitions and concepts are defined exclusively in terms of the mental states they are related to, or, still better, the mental states they are *part* of. That is to say, Maimon uses the notion of an 'object' as if it has the very same meaning as the notion of an *'intentional object'*. This is, indeed, a very crucial feature of Maimon's ontology, to which I will return at length in subsequent chapters. I make mention of it here mainly to emphasize the specific character of Maimon's interpretation of the status of

---

[57] "Das bestimmte Bewußtseyn eines jeden Bestandtheils des zu verbindenden Mannigfaltigen *an sich*, außer der *Verbindung* durchs Denken, ist *Anschauung*. Das Bewußtseyn eines jeden Bestandtheils des zu verbindenden Mannigfaltigen, nicht nur *an sich*, sondern zugleich als eines Bestandtheils dieses zu verbindenden Mannigfaltigen, ist *Vorstellung* dieses zu verbindenen Mannigfaltigen. Das Bewußtseyn eines jeden Bestandtheils nicht nur als eines Bestandtheils *dieses*, sondern *mehrerer* zu verbindenden Mannigfaltigen, ist *Begriff* dieses Mannigfaltigen. Die besondere *Bestimmung* der Anschauung ist *Objekt der Anschauung*. Das an sich bestimmte, in einer Einheit des Bewußtseyns zu verbindende Mannigfaltige ist *Objekt des Denkens*. Das in einer Einheit des Bewußtseyns verbundene Mannigfaltige, ist *Objekt der Vorstellung*. Die mehrern, durch einen gemeinschaftlichen Begriff vorgestellten Objekte, sind zusammengenommen *Objekte des Begriffs*."Maimon, *Logik*, p. 16.

concepts and intuitions. That is, Maimon resisted the Kantian inclination to relate the distinction between concept and intuition to such quite diverse dichotomies as form/content, spontaneity/receptivity, universal/particular[58], and, consequently, evaded the problems raised by them.[59] So, in stressing that concepts and intuitions are mental states, Maimon was able to emphasize the fact that they, at least in one respect, resemble one another — both have an intentional object of their own, i.e. both are *intentional* states of mind. They differ, Maimon argues, because they have different *kinds* of objects. This statement is of utmost importance for a proper understanding of Maimon's account of concepts and intuitions. I shall, therefore, take a close look at it.

The difference between the intentional object of an intuition and that of a concept is, according to Maimon, that the former is a *real* object[60], the latter a *possible* one. In addition to this Maimon holds that the *possibility* and the *reality* of any intentional object are completely independent of one another. It might be the case that a possible object is not real, as is, for example, the case with Kant's famous, imagined coin, which has the very same qualities as a real coin, except for its being real. But, and this is much more striking, it might, according to Maimon, be the case as well that a real object is not possible. In fact — but notice that I am speaking of *intentional* objects — this is for us, finite minds, always so. Of course, everything here depends upon what meaning we attach to 'real' and 'possible'. Maimon gives two, closely related, senses of these terms. The first sense contains a reference to the way the mind is related to the genesis of the object:

> All intuitions, as far as they are represented in time and space, are real, but not possible, as far as we do not comprehend their genesis. All concepts (even if they are '*omni modo determinata*') are possible, i.e. we comprehend the reason of the unity in their manifold, but not real, because this unity is not thought in time and space.[61a]

---

[58] See, for example, respectively, *KdrV*, B102/ß6-77; *KdrV*, B33/A19; *KdrV*, B377/A320.

[59] As, for example, the "tricky question of affection".

[60] It is a completely determined object *because* it is an actual object of experience. Cf. footnote 25, above, p. 66.

[61a] "Alle Anschauungen, in so fern sie in Zeit und Raum vorgestellet werden, sind wirklich, aber nicht möglich, in so fern wir ihre Entstehungsart nicht einsehen. Alle Begriffe,

The second sense specifies the kind of synthesis implied by the object in question:

> The judgement about the objective possibility of a thing, entails four judgements. 1) the absence of impossibility (of contradiction); 2) the absence of necessity; 3) a positive reason for the possibility; 4) the absence of reality[61]
> The reality requires therefore another definition: namely, the real is that in which I actually perceive a synthesis, not, however, according to rules of the understanding (...), but just [according to the operations] of the imagination.[62]

Let me explain the purport of these quotations. For Maimon, every (intentional) object implies a synthesis, a compound mental state, a being conscious of a *unified manifold.* We might state this linguistically as well (since, as noted above, there was for Maimon and his contemporaries no interesting difference between mental and linguistic ways of representation): the awareness of an object implies, for Maimon, a judgement—something being predicated of something else. Now such an object, such a unified manifold, such a subject-predicate combination, is, according to Maimon, *possible* (a) if the two components involved do not contradict —this is the condition for the possibility of an object at all ("ein Objekt überhaupt"), which is purely a logical condition; (b) if the components do not imply one another—for, if they did, the object would have been necessary, not possible; (c) if there is a positive reason for their possible conjunction—this will turn out to be the crucial condition, grounded in the so-called *Principle of Determinability*,[63] stating that a conjunction is *possible* only if we can

---

(ja sollten sie auch *'omni modo determinata'* seyn) sind möglich, d.h. wir sehen den Grund der Einheit in ihrem Mannigfaltigen ein, aber nicht wirklich; weil diese Einheit nicht in Zeit und Raum gedacht wird.", Maimon, *Transscendentalphilosophie*, p. 249.

[61] "Das Urtheil von der objektiven Möglichkeit eines Dinges, begreift vier Urtheile in sich. 1) Mangel der Unmöglichkeit (des Widerspruchs); 2) Mangel der Nothwendigkeit; 3) einen positiven Grund der Möglichkeit; 4) Mangel der Wirklichkeit.", ibid. p. 247.

[62] "Die Wirklichkeit erfordert also eine andere Definition: nämlich das Wirkliche ist dasjenige, worinnen ich zwar eine Synthesis, aber nicht nach Gesetzen des Verstandes (...), sondern bloß der Einbildungskraft wahrnehme.", ibid. p. 102.

[63] See for a concised formulation of it, Maimon, *Logik*, p. 20. I will discuss the principle at length in Chapter Five, especially pp. 1o8-116.

understand it is; (d) if the components are *not* (yet) *actually* combined — after all, 'actuality' is a mark of the real[64], not of the possible.

From this definition of the possibility of an object we can infer a similar definition of the reality of an object. Clearly the first two conditions will have to be met by the reality of an object too. If a real object is to be an object at all, (a) its components should not contradict, and, also, since a real object is not a necessary one, (b) its components should not imply one another. The differences arise with regard to the latter two conditions. Maimon seems to imply that (c) there is *no* positive reason for the conjunction of the components of a *real* object. The reason for this apparently strange condition follows directly from a, for Maimon, quite common-sensical understanding of *necessity*: if there was such a positive reason, then this would yield, together with the fulfilment of the last condition, that (d) the two components are *actually* combined, the unwanted result of the object not being *real* at all, since it would, then, be *necessary*.

Granted that these latter conditions specify the reality of an object, then it must indeed be the case that every real object implies a synthesis *which should not be understood.* Such a synthesis is, according to Maimon, a synthesis of the imagination, i.e. a conjunction of two components *not* by virtue of some rule of the understanding. Such a synthesis is, Maimon asserts, an *intuition*, a conjunction of two components *in space and time*.[65] This implies, finally, that a concept, being a rule of the understanding which generates syntheses, does not have a *real* intentional object, but only *possible* ones.[66]

Before we are tempted to object that the coherence of this view depends upon a misinterpretation of the distinctions between the categories of modality, we should realize that Maimon is not concerned here with objects as things in themselves. All objects, he claims, are *intentional objects*; they are determinate only with respect to a determinate mental state, or consciousness. And this makes all the difference, because the mode of an intentional object is determined by the mental state it is the object of. A determinate mental state cannot, however, be

---

[64] In the sense that an actuality must be determined completely.
[65] Maimon, *Transscendentalphilosophie*, p. 104-105
[66] Maimon, *Logik*, pp. 261-262.

the *same state* while determining *different modes* of an object. In other words, *every mode* of an object implies a different mental state, and Maimon is doing nothing but defining the special features of these different states.

A determinate mental state of a triangle having three sides, for example, implies an intentional object that is *necessary*, for there cannot be a mental state of a triangle which is not, by that very fact, a mental state of a space bounded by three lines. This does not, to be sure, imply that this determinate mental state is also a mental state of a *real* object. No, it could not possibly be. A determinate mental state which is a state of a *real* object, for example a real triangle, is something completely different. In such a state the two components will not be 'triangle' and 'having three sides', but rather '*this* triangle' and 'having these three sides'. It is crucial to estimate the function of the indexicals 'this' and 'these'. They refer to a specific spatio-temporal unit—for Maimon the ground for the *reality* of intentional objects. These indexicals embody the essential feature of *real* objects: that we do not *understand* their conjunction, i.e. that we do not know anything of their genesis. In other words, real objects are intentional objects of mental states that are intuitions: states we happen to be in without having the faintest idea about what caused them. That is, we understand that every triangle (hence, *this* specific triangle as well) has three sides, but we do not understand why this triangle has *these* three sides. There is no reason for it, but its being *given* in space and time. To put it differently, the *reality* of this specific triangle *consists in* it being the intentional object of an *intuition*, i.e. in there being *no positive reason* for the conjunction of its components *and* its being *actually given in space and time*. Whereas Maimon's favourite example of a *necessary* object is, indeed, that of a triangle having three sides, his favourite example of a *real* object is, usually, that of gold being yellow.[67] After all, there is clearly still no reason for gold to be yellow; that conjunction must, till eternity, be *given* in experience.

---

[67] See, for example, Maimon, *Transscendentalphilosophie*, p. 102. It is, by the way, very characteristic of the poor quality of the index of the new edition of Maimon's *Logik* (Kantgesellschaft, Heidelberg, 1912) that it contains over 40 references to the examples Maimon uses. Hence, see that index on 'gold', too.

Now these mental states of *real* objects could not, at the same time, be mental states of *possible* objects as well. Since there cannot be a positive reason for the conjunction of components that make up real objects, and since there has to be such a reason for a synthesis that makes up a *possible* object, we have to accept that, for example, 'gold' and 'yellow' cannot possibly be the components of a possible object. Good candidates, conversely, are for example 'straight' and 'line'. These are not necessarily connected, for we can think, for example, of curved lines as well. Moreover, as long as there are no indexicals involved (which, to be sure, would change the mental state into another one, into a synthesis of, for example, 'that line' and 'straight'), they are not really connected. But, nevertheless, there is a positive reason for their possible conjunction. After all, we *cannot* think of 'straightness' without, at the same time, having to think of 'line' as well. Only lines can be straight. Behind this fact is the principle I already mentioned: the *Principle of Determinability*. It is the principle behind all concepts. For concepts are nothing but rules of the understanding, rules by virtue of which we can make a synthesis of a manifold. And the *Principle of Determinability* does nothing else but help us determine a certain manifold as a *unified manifold*, i.e. help us identify a certain manifold (the *genus*) by means of a specific feature ("Merkmal", the *species*). In other words, this principle does nothing else but generate concepts. So, it helps us, for example, by generating the concept of a *straight line*, which is a mental state governed by a rule of the understanding, enabling us to know *possible* objects: lines (the manifold or *genus*) that are straight (the "Merkmal" or *species*).

The consequence of Maimon's position with respect to concepts and intuitions is that we *cannot* have a concept *and* an intuition of the *same object*. This is indeed the radical conclusion anticipated by my discussion in the previous section of Maimon's account of the idea of a synthetic judgement a priori. Here we should, again, emphasize that this radical conclusion has everything to do with the fact that our human understanding is finite. This is not to say that the *infinite mind* which is

for Maimon a very important 'idea'[68], has both a concept and an intuition of one and the same object, since the infinite mind does not have intuitions at all. It does not need them, because it possesses of every possible object the *complete* rule for generating it. Hence, it only knows necessary objects; the possibility of an object implies, for the infinite mind, its reality, because the *Principle of Determinability* always provides the infinite mind with the *complete* rule of any possible object.

The finitude of our minds, in contrast, consists precisely in our need for *intuitions* to be able to be conscious of *real* objects. We do not possess *concepts* of real, *concrete* objects. The rules of our understanding do not enable us anything more than to know *possible* objects, since these rules are, characteristically, *incomplete*. Our minds can only grasp some small series of determinations: 'straightness' being of 'lines'; 'yellow' being of 'colour', and 'colour' being of 'surface', but we never arrive from 'surface' up to the mere 'determinable' in order to grasp the complete series of determinations that make up the *complete*

---

[68] 'Idea' is a technical notion here: "An idea is a method to find a transition from the representation or the concept of a thing to the thing itself. It does not determine an object of intution, but it still does determine a real object, of which the object of intuition is the scheme; for example, our understanding is the scheme for the idea of an infinite understanding. The scheme refers here to the idea, and the idea refers to the thing itself or to its existence, without which both the idea and the scheme would not have been possible. Thus I disagree with Kant in two ways. 1) Rather than presupposing three ideas I think one idea will suffice (the idea of an infinite mind). 2) Contrary to Kant, who thinks that these ideas are no objects of our knowledge at all, I think they are indeed no objects of intuition, but, to be sure, they are objects of understanding, which are known by us as determinate objects of thought, not immediately in themselves, but by means of their scheme (that of themselves that is given in intuition)."; "Eine Idee ist eine Methode, einen Uebergang von der Vorstellung oder dem Begriffe eines Dinges zum Dinge selbst zu finden; sie bestimmt zwar kein Objekt der Anschauung, aber sie bestimmt doch ein reelles Objekt, dessen Schema das Objekt der Anschauung ist z.B. das Schema zu der Idee eines unendlichen Verstandes ist unser Verstand. Dieses Schema deutet hier auf die Idee, und die Idee auf das Ding selbst oder auf seine Existenz, ohne welche diese Idee und ihr Schema selbst unmöglich wären. Ich weiche also in diesen zwei hauptstücken von hrn. Kants Meinung ab. 1) Daß ich anstatt der drei Ideen, die er annimmt, eine einzige für hinreichend halte (die Idee eines unendlichen Verstandes). 2) Anstatt daß Herr Kant dergleichen Ideen für gar keine Objekte unsrer Erkenntniß hält, ich sie zwar für keine Objekte der Anschauung, wohl aber für Objekte des Verstandes, die, wenn schon nicht an sich (unmittelbar) dennoch vermittelst ihres Schema's (was von ihnen in der Anschauung gegeben ist) als bestimmte Objekte des Denkens von uns erkannt werden." *Transscendentalphilosophie*, pp. 365-366.

concept, and, consequently, the *concrete* object of 'gold'. So we need *intuitions* of gold, in order to...well, what? Not, of course, in order to be able to *understand* that gold is yellow; not, that is, in order to grasp the *reason why* of the conjunction of 'gold' and 'yellow'. No, we need *intuitions* merely to be *aware of the fact* — the experiential reality — *that* it happens to be the case that gold is yellow.

Our concept of gold (if we have one) is not *of* the same thing as one of our intuitions of gold; i.e. the 'determinable' of a synthesis of the understanding cannot be the 'determinable' of a synthesis of the imagination. The gold we understand (if we can at all), using rules of the understanding, is not the gold we are aware of, using intuitions. This is so, because the 'determinable' of an intuition is really nothing but a specific spatio-temporal unit, in which a qualitative manifold is taken together, with the help of the imagination, not with the help of a rule of the understanding. The 'determinable' of a concept, on the other hand, is always an abstract feature, a "Merkmal", itself a rule for unifying a manifold.[69]

All of this leads, again, now along the lines of Maimon's radicalization of the Kantian distinction between concepts and intuitions, to the *Antinomy of Thought*. Kant was not only wrong, when he asserted that we can solve the problem of experience by witnessing the distinction between appearances and things in themselves, and not only when he assumed the *fact that* we do apply synthetic judgements a priori to empirical objects, but also, and this is just the same mistake from another perspective, when he thought that every representation is a synthesis of an intuition with a concept. He is wrong here, because every intuition and every concept can be considered a representation, but the former one only has real objects, that are not possible, and the latter one only has possible objects, that are not real. For us, finite beings, never the twain will meet. Hence, an account of thinking will turn out to be a defense of the *Antinomy of Thought*.

---

[69] I won't elaborate on it here, but I will deal with this at length in Chapter Six, pp. 140-146.

4. The Antinomy of Thought

There is only one passage in the work of Salomon Maimon, and not even in one of his major publications, in which he himself uses the words "Antinomie des Denkens" to describe the problem that is central to his work. It is nevertheless a passage that might function as a key to an understanding of his criticism of Kant:

> The *thing in itself* therefore is an idea of reason produced by Reason itself in order to solve a *universal Antinomy of Thought at all*. For thought at all consists in a relation between a form (a rule of the understanding) and a content (the subsumed given). It is impossible to arrive at the consciousness of the form without the content, which means that the content is a necessary precondition of thought. That is, in order to perform a real thought a form or rule of the understanding should necessarily be given a content to which it is related. On the other hand, however, the completeness of a thought of an object requires that nothing in it is *given*, i.e. that everything in it is *thought*.[70]

In order to get an initial grasp of how Maimon's understanding of the *Antinomy of Thought* might be used in an analysis of the aporetic character of the structure of our accounts of thinking, I shall, in this final section, reformulate the conclusions of the previous sections as different versions of this *Antinomy*, making references to the distinction between *finding* and *making* as well.

The first formulation concerns the *objects* of thought. Here we are dealing with Maimon's reading of the Kantian distinction between appearances and things in themselves, which led to a distinction between *'objects determined by thought'* and *'objects determined out-*

---

[70] "Das *Ding an sich* ist also eine Vernunftidee die von der Vernunft selbst zur Auflösung einer *allgemeinen Antinomie des Denkens überhaupt* gegeben ist. Denn das Denken überhaupt bestehet in Beziehung einer Form (Regel des Verstandes) auf eine Materie (das ihr subsumirte Gegebne). Ohne Materie kann man zum Bewußtseyn der Form nicht gelangen, folglich ist die Materie eine nothwendige bedingung des Denkens, d.h. zum reellen Denken einer Form oder Verstandesregel muß nothwendig eine Materie, worauf sie sich beziehet, gegeben werden; auf der andern Seite hingegen erfordert die Vollständigkeit des Denkens eines Objekts, daß nichts darinn *gegeben*, sondern alles *gedacht* werden soll.", Maimon, *Wörterbuch*, p. 162.

side of thought' — a distinction, to be sure, that does not parallel the Kantian one, but takes over its function in a critical philosophy. I suggest that the first formulation runs as follows:

(1) Thesis: Real thought will only be real thought if it determines its object according to rules of the understanding.

Antithesis: Real thought will only be real thought if its object is given to thought as determined outside of thought.

The thesis specifies that we can view the act of thinking to be an act of *making* something meaningful, i.e. an act that specifies, by means of rules of the understanding, a location within a conceptual framework. On this view, the object thought is related to is, actually, a *product* of thought; nothing more than a possibly occupied location within a conceptual framework. On the other hand, if we take notice of the antithesis, the story is quite the reverse. Thinking is, according to the antithesis, an event of *finding* a meaningful world, i.e. an event in which the properties of actual objects are given to consciousness. The object thought is related to is in no way a product of thought; it is, instead, something *given* to thought, something that might possibly turn out to be intelligible.

According to this formulation of the *Antinomy of Thought*, the structure of our accounts of thinking has an aporetic character because the objects of thought must be taken to be both *objects determined by thought* and *objects determined outside of thought* — which is for us, finite minds, incomprehensible because we cannot understand the possibility of an identity between these two notions.

The second formulation concerns the '*medium*' in which thought is present as an activity. Here we deal with Maimon's reading of Kant's treatment of *synthetic judgements a priori*, considered to be, by Kant as well as by Maimon, the proper carriers of real thought, i.e. of thought that concerns reality as it is — in short, of empirical knowledge. I propose the following formulation to express how, according to Maimon,

the idea of a synthetic judgement a priori reveals the *Antinomy of Thought*:

(2) Thesis: Real thought must be expressed by judgements that reveal the *reason why* they apply to the objects they are about.

Antithesis: Real thought must be expressed by judgements that reveal the *fact that* they apply to the objects they are about.

The point of the thesis is to assert that, in order for a judgement to be informative about the object it applies to, it has to explain *why* the determination and the 'determinable' are related to one another. This means that the judgement has to specify, by means of rules of the understanding, a location within a conceptual framework. Again, the point of the antithesis is quite the reverse. It states that, in order for a judgement to be informative about the object it applies to, it has to reveal *that* the determination and the 'determinable' are actually related to one another. This means that the judgement should express an intuition of a spatio-temporal connection between determination and 'determinable'.

According to this second formulation of the *Antinomy of Thought*, the structure of our accounts of thinking has an aporetic character because the judgements by means of which we might be able to express our understanding of the relation between thoughts and objects should be both *a priori* and *synthetic*—which is for us, finite minds, incomprehensible, because knowing a judgement to be *a priori* implies the impossibility of knowing it is *synthetic*, and vice versa.

The final formulation of the *Antinomy of Thought* concerns the functions of the consciousness in which the relation between thoughts and objects manifests itself. Here we are dealing with Maimon's radicalization of the Kantian distinction between concepts and intuitions. I suggest that the following formulation expresses Maimon's understanding of the different functions of concepts and intuitions in real thought:

(3) Thesis: Real thought must have, in order to be real thought, a conceptual character; that is, it must consist of a synthesis according to a rule of the understanding.

Antithesis: Real thought must have, in order to be real thought, an intuitive character; that is, it must consist of a synthesis of the imagination.

If we overlook the reference to the different faculties of mind, this third formulation is almost the same as the first one. That is, the thesis claims that the act of thinking makes use of concepts, rules of the understanding that specify locations in a conceptual framework. Thus, the act of thinking is an act of *making* something meaningful, an act that starts from the intelligibility of conceptual relations. The further point of Maimon's radicalization of the Kantian distinction between concept and intuition now turns out to be that this something, which is made meaningful, cannot be anything more than an *empty* location within a conceptual framework. That is, the objects referred to by means of concepts are just *possible*, not *real*.

The antithesis, however, claims the reverse. The act of thinking must make use of intuitions, i.e. states of mind that specify *real* syntheses, connections between determinations and 'determinables' that actually are *given* in space and time, without there being any reason for their being given. In other words, if thought is going to be related to anything at all, thinking will turn out to be the event of *finding* a meaningful world, an event that starts from there being something rather than nothing. Again, there is the further point of Maimon's radicalization of Kant's distinction between concept and intuition: the world we will be able to *find* by means of intuition, will not be an intelligible world.

According to this final formulation of the *Antinomy of Thought*, the structure of our accounts of thinking will have an aporetic character, because we have to do justice, in such accounts, to both the function of concepts and the function of intuitions, even though these notions imply altogether incompatible relations we must assume exist between thoughts and objects.

The point of this chapter, to conclude, has been to elucidate how Maimon arrived at the *Antinomy of Thought* by means of his reading of Kant. One of the central claims of this thesis is that a reconstruction of this *Antinomy*, and of Maimonian skepticism considered as a defense of this *Antinomy*, will provide the material for an argument in favour of the claim that the structure of our articulations of the relation between thoughts and objects have an intrinsically aporetic character. In the next two chapters I will develop this argument, by taking a detailed look at both *the value of skepticism* and *the failure of dogmatism.*

CHAPTER FIVE

THE VALUE OF SKEPTICISM

Skepticism has turned out to be epistemology's Mr. Hyde—the anonymous letter[1] every dogmatic philosopher will find one day on his doormat, fearing somewhere deep down that he himself is responsible for it. Like the dragon with seven heads it has proved to be ineradicable. Nevertheless, modern philosophy thinks skepticism has to be refuted.[2] It shouldn't, as might read one of the morals of my attempt to revalue Maimon's critique of Kant. Skepticism is indeed a serious matter[3], but not a threatening enemy. Instead, if properly formulated, it provides a powerful way to understand the *Antinomy of Thought* as a plausible account of human thought and its problem of experience[4], or,

---

[1] See Richard Popkin's article on skepticism in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (ed. Edwards): "...skepticism has not functioned in philosophy as merely one more position alongside idealism, materialism, and realism. Instead, it has been an anonymous letter received by a dogmatic philosopher who does hold a position."

[2] See David R. Hiley's *Philosophy in Question. Essays on a Pyrrhonian Theme* (Chicago, 1988) for an opposition between skepticism and modern philosophy which tries to make sense of a connection between skepticism and postmodernism. Hiley's claims as regards skepticism resemble however, as a matter of fact, more what I have to say about irony in the Postscript than what I am going to say about Maimonian skepticism in this chapter.

[3] Unlike Michael Williams suggestion "that we get off the treadmill by overcoming the philosophical obsession with skepticism", in "Coherence, Justification, and Truth", *Review of Metaphysics*, 1980.

[4] The central theme of this chapter, that skepticism clarifies in a significant way the human condition, i.e. what it means for us to have a finite understanding, to be trapped,

so I will argue in this chapter. Moreover, and this will be the central claim of my argument, a properly formulated skepticism will help us understand in what way the aporetic character of the structure of our articulations of thinking is characteristic of our understanding of thought itself. Crucial to such a formulation of skepticism are the notions of a *'reason why'* and a *'fact that'*, notions that reflect the distinction between the *Quid juris* and the *Quid facti*. I will discuss the details of this distinction in section 1. In order to understand the implications of this distinction, it is necessary to provide a careful analysis of the way in which Maimonian skepticism is based upon the *Principle of Determinability*. I will do that in section 2.

Occasionally I will, in this chapter, refer to the slogans with which I began this thesis (i.e. *'finding* a meaningful world', and *'making* the world meaningful), suggesting that Maimon's analysis throws light upon the views behind these slogans.

1. *Quid juris* and *Quid facti*

As a plain start, let me claim that Maimonian skepticism consists of a defense of the *Antinomy of Thought*, which implies that it should provide both a convincing argument for the thesis and one for the antithesis. Here, I will argue for this directly with respect to the second formulation of the *Antinomy*, leaving the other formulations for close examination to the following chapter.

Thus, Maimonian skepticism argues for the following two theses:

(2) Thesis: Real thought must be expressed by judgements that reveal the *reason why* they apply to the objects they are about.

Antithesis: Real thought must be expressed by judgements that reveal the *fact that* they apply to the objects they are about.

---

that is, in an *Antinomy of Thought*, is also one of the motives underlying Barry Stroud's *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* (Oxford, 1984), as well as Stanley Cavell's *In Quest of the Ordinary. Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago, 1988)

The first thing to notice is that according to Maimon, skepticism is not merely a matter of doubt. Even though it might be true that the skeptic often appears to be a philosopher who is parasitic upon the knowledge-claims of others, just trying to create doubt, one is bound to miss the essential point of skepticism if one regards it as just that. Doubt merely is the upshot of skepticism for those who are no skeptics; seen from the point of view of skepticism itself, Maimon argues, it amounts to an account of the human condition: a positive account of what it means to be cursed with a finite understanding.[5] That is, skepticism is itself a *claim* about the conditions of knowledge (or, as Maimon would say, about the conditions of *real* thought), and, by that, a *claim* about our inability to satisfy them.

But what, exactly, does these claims entail? What does it mean for a judgement to reveal the *reason why*, and what to reveal the *fact that* it applies? And how are we to understand the meaning of an *Antinomy*? How are we to value the significance of two incompatible claims about the same thing? Should we not just resign, pleased again by the obvious self-refuting character of skepticism?

No, we should not, as I will argue – and my point is that Maimon's analysis of the difference between the *Quid juris* and the *Quid facti* amounts to more than just another skeptical argument. Its strength is that it explains *why* skeptical arguments are so persistent, since it makes it clear that real thought demands an answer to both questions, even though for a finite understanding answering one of them implies being unable to answer the other.

Maimon's account of the distinction between the *Quid juris* and the *Quid facti* should be understood against the background of his pre-

---

[5] We should take Maimon's criticism of Aenesidemus in this light. Maimon thinks Aenesidemus is much more sympathetic to dogmatism than Kant, because Aenesidemus just *doubts* that any philosopher, so far, was able to prove anything "about the being and non-being of things in themselves and their properties, or about the limits of the human faculties of cognition"; "über das Dasein und Nichtseyn der Dinge an sich und ihrer Eigenschaften, noch über die Gränzen der menschlichen Erkenntnißkräfte". (*Aenesidemus oder über die Fundamente der von dem Herrn Professor Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementar-Philosophie*, Berlin, 1911, p. 18) See *Logik*, pp. 299-300.

sumption that, in the final analysis, an object can be nothing but (and this must be taken literally[6]) that what is identified, by means of a judgement, with respect to a conscious subject. Accordingly, an object has, in the final analysis, no other features than those ascribed to it by means of a judgement. Or, as Maimon says:

> Here it is my aim to show how the elements of a *judgement* (subject and predicate) are as well the elements of the *object* the judgement is about.[7]

This means that it will, in the final analysis, make no sense to distinguish between the *Quid juris* and the *Quid facti*, because the *fact that* a judgement applies to the object it is about, is, *by the same token*, the *reason why* it applies: namely, nothing but the actual existence of the judgement.

That we all, however, notwithstanding this, do grasp a distinction between the *fact that* a judgement applies, and the *reason why* it does, is according to Maimon a consequence of our having a finite mind. That is, it seems to be the case that *we* have to accept that it is up to the *contingency* of the world of experience to account for the *fact that* a specific judgement applies to the object it refers to. As it happens to be the case, it is a *fact that* "gold is yellow". Mere contingency, however, does not seem to provide a *reason why* "is yellow" applies to "gold"[8]. After all, as long as it makes sense to ask *why* a fact is what it is, we do not appear to have understood the *reason why* it *has to*. Accordingly, this seems to suggest that the *reason why* a judgement does apply to the object it is about, has got something to do with *explaining* the synthesis expressed by the judgement. It seems, that is, to be the case that a judgement does only reveal the *reason why* it applies if it is self-evident, if it gives expression to a rule of the understanding that might not be violated. To give a twist to a well-known example, analytic judge-

---

[6] Remember that, for Maimon, all objects *are* intentional objects. See above, pp. 63-66, and 83-87.

[7] "Hier ist meine Absicht zu zeigen, wie die Bestandtheile eines *Urtheils* (Subjekt und Prädikat) eben die Bestandtheile des *Objekts*, wovon geurtheilt wird, sind", *Logik*, p. 254.

[8] A *fact* is no *reason*, according to Maimon. Cf. *Transscendentalphilosophie*, pp. 107-109.

ments like "a husband is a married man" are self-evident in this way: the rule of the understanding that governs the use of 'husband' (in ordinary speech, the *concept* of an husband) would be violated by the denial of this judgement.

This allows us to formulate the finitude of our minds the other way round: *we* have to depend upon the contingency of the world of experience, because our understanding is not able to produce *self-evident* judgements that express a complete determination of an object. And, of course, if an object cannot be anything but that what is identified by means of a judgement, this means that a judgement must express a *complete* determination, in order for the object it is about, to be *real.* Thus, in one more formulation, our having a finite mind consists in our being unable to provide the *reason why* real objects are the way they are. We just have to accept the *fact that* they are what they are, without being able to understand *why.*[9]

Taking into account that an analysis of real thought is, for Maimon, an analysis of the process of making judgements, we can formulate our finitude in terms of the deficiencies involved in the four different kinds of judgements we can produce. According to Maimon, there are two extreme kinds of judgements: the one being absolutely *necessary* (in the sense of being undeniably true), but, as far as we can see, absolutely devoid of information; the other being absolutely *informative*, but, as far as we can see, absolutely devoid of necessity. These are, (1) analytic judgements a priori, that possess a *formal* necessity, because their predicate is identical to a part of their subject; and (2) synthetic judge-

---

[9] This way of formulating what it means to have a finite mind, explains why we encounter the following problems in the models of *finding* and *making* : (1) What is the meaning of "meaningful" in '*finding* a meaningful world'?; and (2) What is the meaning of "the world" in '*making* the world meaningful? The point of these questions is that we might conceive of thinking as (1) a matter of *finding*, but then we have to accept that the world we find does not seem to be intelligible, which makes it hard to explain what it means to maintain that this world is meaningful; or (2) a matter of *making*, but then we have to accept that what we make does not seem to be real, which makes it hard to explain what it means to maintain that this is nevertheless the world. In footnotes 18, 19, 46, 55, 57, 61, 62 I will 'translate' the course of Maimon's arguments for his skeptical position as illuminations of the slogans I have introduced to indicate the way in which our accounts of thinking can be understood to have an aporetic character.

ments a posteriori, that are merely *arbitrary*, because they consist of a synthesis of a subject with a predicate that do not have anything to do with one another. In addition we can produce two kinds of intermediary judgements, being both necessary and informative. These are (3) synthetic judgements a priori, that exhibit a *transcendental* necessity; i.e. they express the need that they *have to* be true (even though it might be the case that they aren't), because we need the *fact that* they apply to the objects they are about, in order for experience to be possible at all (therefore these judgements are merely *hypothetically* informative); and (4) synthetic judgements a priori, that exhibit an incomprehensible *factual* necessity, forced on us by intuition in connection with our ability to construct objects, as is the case in mathematics[10] (therefore these judgements are merely *intuitively* necessary).[11]

The first kind of judgements do typically have an analytic character. Even though they are perfectly self-evident, giving expression to a rule of the understanding, we have to be very skeptical about their ability to serve as expressions of real thought. The point is that the necessity they

---

[10] Remember that, according to Maimon, a synthetic judgement a priori in mathematics is derived from the occurrence of two synthetic judgements a posteriori, that are necessarily related by means of an a priori activity of the mind: the *construction* of an object. See above, pp. 73-74.

[11] For those familiar with the philosophy of Leibniz it will prove fruitful to situate my discussion of Maimon's distinction between the *Quid juris* and the *Quid facti* in this section and of his *Principle of Determinability* in the next section in a Leibnizian context. Leibniz made a distinction between *truths of reason* and *truths of fact*, the former being analytic and necessary, the latter analytic and contingent. Problems arise once Leibniz tries to account for the difference between the attributes of *analyticity*, *necessity* and *contingency* given that necessity and contingency seem to exclude one another but that it nevertheless should be possible for analyticity to be combined with both. Seen in this light Maimon's distinction between the *Quid juris* and the *Quid facti* might be viewed as an attempt (1) to make sense of the attributes of truths of reason such that they might be grasped independently of their supposed common root: the logical Principle of Identity or Non-Contradiction; and (2) to make sense of the combination of analyticity and contingency as attributes of truths of fact without having to take recourse to a Kantian kind of reformulation which would somehow amount to the opposite (contingent being synthetic, thus not analytic; analytic being a priori, thus not contingent). Maimon's *Principle of Determinability*, subsequently, might in this light be viewed as an attempt to substitute the logical Principle of Identity in such a way that Maimon's *Principle* might be said to govern both the non-trivial truths of reason and the non-arbitrary truths of fact, i.e. all real truths. In this context Maimon's distinction between our finite understanding and the idea of an infinite understanding is typically Leibnizian in spirit, as will become apparent throughout this chapter.

possess, is merely *formal* — it follows from the fact that the predicate is identical to a part of the subject. Therefore, the necessity of such a judgement is independent of the reality of the object it is about. As a consequence, it is possible that the kind of necessity involved in such a judgement is actually quite arbitrary. Dealing with nothing but the *form* of judgements, we will not be in a position to prevent an *arbitrary nominalism*. The *reason why* an analytic judgement applies to the object it is about, being merely a *formal* affair, can, in other words, be a matter of an arbitrary definition of how a notion ought to be used. It might, that is, be a matter of stipulating a class of objects without taking into account whether this class forms a real, natural kind at all (to use a contemporary notion). This leads us to an awareness of the fact that there is a way in which it makes sense to ask *why* an analytic judgement applies to the object it is about, a sense that refers to the fact that analytic judgements do not reveal the *reason why* it is a *fact that* they apply to the objects they are about.

Let me give a few examples:

(1) A triangle has three sides.
(2) A wife is a woman.
(3) A human being is rational.

In a way these are all analytic statements (given that a triangle *is, by definition*, a space bounded by three lines, a wife a married woman, and a human being a rational animal). Consequently they reveal in a *formal* way the *reason why* they do apply to the objects they are about. That is, a human being *is* rational, for, if it wasn't, it would, by definition, not have been a human being in the first place. Of course, such a response does not *really* answer our question why it would be the case that a human being is rational.[12] It might be that such a response works

[12] It is because of this reason that Maimon, at times, states that analytic judgements, at least as far as they are merely formal judgements (as Kant takes them to be), do not express any thought at all. See his *Logik*, pp. 28-29: "I maintain, however, that *analytical* thought, in which the predicate is developed out of the *concept* of the subject, and (partly) is *identical* with it, is not thought at all, because if the predicate is already thought in the concept of the subject, there is no need to think it anew"; "Ich hingegen halte das *analytische* Denken, wo das Prädikat aus dem *Begriffe* des Subjekts entwickelt,

with respect to the first statement (or, perhaps even with respect to the second one), but, as we all know since Quine[13], this might merely be a matter of habit, of using the notion of a triangle only in contexts where the stipulated meaning holds, whereas we use the notion of a human being (in contradistinction with Aristotle?) in a variety of contexts not all of which support the stipulated meaning.

The point is not, of course, that we have to accept the relativistic conclusion of Quine; quite the contrary. What Maimon is arguing, is that the *formal* notion of a *reason why* a judgement would apply to the object it is about, is not good enough. The kind of reason that would suit as a condition for real thought does not merely produce a *formal necessity*, but should rather produce an *informative necessity*. The *reason why* a judgement applies to the object it is about, should not be a matter of *stipulative definitions*, but has to be a matter of *explanations*, a matter of taking into account what *is* the case, in order to *explain why* it is a *fact that* it is the way it is.[14]

The second kind of judgements is quite the contrary of this first kind, but again, we have to be very skeptical about their ability to serve as expressions of real thought. Again our skepsis follows from the threat of arbitrariness, which is much more direct in this case. After all, a synthesis between two concepts that do not have anything to do with one another, at least not as regards their contents, is a synthesis for which there is no reason at all. Remember that facts are, according to Maimon, no reasons, since a reason must have explanatory power, which facts do not possess. Accordingly, it makes sense to argue that stating a fact blocks the road to knowledge, since it rules out the possibility of understanding the *reason why* it is a *fact that* it is the way it

---

und mit demselben (zum Theil) *identisch* ist, für gar kein Denken, weil, indem das Prädikat im Begriffe des Subjekts schon gedacht worden ist, es nicht aufs neue gedacht zu werden braucht."

[13] Since his attack upon the analytic/synthetic distinction in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", in *The Philosophical Review* 32, 1951. Reprinted in *From a Logical Point of View* (New York, 1961)

[14] We can understand the tenor of this requirement only once we have understood what Maimon means by his claim that all judgements that express real thoughts are governed by the *Principle of Determinability*. See below, p. 118f.

is. Hence Maimon's claim that these synthetic judgements a posteriori do not express any thought at all.[15]

The disapproval of this kind of judgement, as regards the possibility of expressing real thought, is of the same structure as the one against analytic judgements. Just as the *formal* notion of necessity is not good enough to provide an answer to the *Quid juris*, we have to accept that the *arbitrary* notion of informativeness is not good enough to provide an answer to the *Quid facti*. This is so, because it is according to Maimon impossible to identify an object by means of a synthetic judgement a posteriori. As we shall see in the following chapter[16], the synthesis of two concepts that have nothing to do with one another, is, according to Maimon, not a matter of thought, but a matter of cooperation between intuition and imagination, such that it is up to the intuition to identify the object in space-time. Hence, arbitrary thought cannot at all reveal the *fact that* it applies to the object it is about, since it is nothing but a product of the imagination which tries to account for the *fact that* intuition identified something by means of spatio-temporal coordinates. This last fact, however, which is for us a necessary fact, enforced upon us by the contingency of the world of experience, cannot be expressed by means of a judgement.

Should these two extreme kinds of judgements be all our finite mind could produce, it is clear that we would be forced to draw a rather desperate conclusion. Luckily however, we are at least in principle, according to Maimon, also able to produce synthetic judgements a priori, which give us at least a chance of performing real thought. In order for them to be successful, they must give an answer to the *Quid juris* that is not merely formal, but that *explains* the *reality* of the objects they are about; and an answer to the *Quid facti* that is not merely arbitrary, but

---

15 *Logik*, pp. 24-25: "An arbitrary thought has no reason at all, and therefore it actually is not a thought at all. After all, that the predicate does not contradict the subject is a reason for knowledge only if the predicate is a possible *predicate at all*, i.e. if the predicate in question, as well as its opposite, is with respect to consciousness dependent upon the subject."; "Das willkührliche Denken hat gar keinen Grund, und ist also in der That gar kein Denken. Denn daß das Prädikat dem Subjekte nicht widerspricht, ist nur alsdann Erkenntnißgrund, wenn das gedachte Prädikat ein mögliches *Prädikat überhaupt* ist, d.h. wenn das gedachte Prädikat sowohl, als sein Gegentheil, in Ansehung des Bewußtseyns, vom Subjekte abhängig ist."

16 Below, pp. 141-146.

that *reveals* the concept (i.e. the rule of the understanding) of the objects they are about. Unfortunately, synthetic judgements a priori do not succeed in giving these answers (therefore we will have to be skeptics), but, and this is a crucial 'but', they reveal a fundamental *Principle of Thought*[17], such that we are able to understand how and why real thought must be expressed by judgements that reveal both the *reason why* and the *fact that* they do apply to the objects they are about (and therefore we will have to be Maimonian skeptics, defending the *Antinomy of Thought* as a plausible account of our human condition).

The first kind of synthetic judgements a priori possess a *transcendental* necessity, forced on us by an analysis of *real thought* itself: they *have to* apply to real objects, in order to make experience, i.e. real thought, possible at all. Following Kant, Maimon argues that this necessity is self-evident. He accepts that Kant's Transcendental Deduction gives a convincing argument for the following conditional: *either* the categories apply to the objects of experience, *or* experience is merely an illusion. Hence, the necessity of these judgements reveal the *reason why* they have to apply to the objects they are about. But they do not, by that, reveal the *fact that* they do apply, as Maimon never tires of pointing out. Conditionals do not state facts; they need them, in order to be effective. Kant's mistake, according to Maimon, is that he assumed without questioning that experience is not an illusion, thus thinking that his Transcendental Deduction, by providing an answer to the *Quid juris* answers the *Quid facti* as well. But it doesn't, as we saw in the previous chapter.

Notwithstanding this disappointing conclusion, we can learn something important from Maimon's criticism of Kant. An analysis of synthetic judgements a priori allows us to develop a notion of an answer to the *Quid juris* that is not based upon the *form* of the judgement, but upon *the possibility of the reality of an object that possesses the determinations expressed in the judgement as if they were inner features of the object in question.*[18] As a consequence, it is possible to

---

[17] This is the Maimonian *Principle of Determinability* that I will discuss in the following section.

[18] The point of this notion, in terms of *finding* and *making*, is that it aims to clarify the meaning of "meaningful" in '*finding* a meaningful world', without the need to revert to a

argue with Maimon in favour of the thesis of the *Antinomy of Thought*. That is to say, the notion of a *'reason why'* under consideration is an essential precondition of real thought, in such a way that judgements that reveal this kind of *reason*, do really possess part of what is needed for a performance of real thought. In other words, real thought is *really possible*, even though it might be that we will never be able to attain it. It is to this that Maimonian skepticism amounts, but a sufficient defence of it will only be possible after the introduction of the *Principle of Determinability*.

There is, however, more to real thought than only an adequate answer to the *Quid juris*. The *Quid facti* must be answered too, and although Maimon claims that the *Quid facti* cannot be answered in physics, it can, according to him, be answered in mathematics. Therefore, we can learn something about the *Quid facti* from an analysis of the last kind of judgement that we are able to produce. These are the synthetic judgements a priori that make up the body of mathematical knowledge. They do, indeed, possess a necessity of a *factual* kind, but do not reveal the *reason why* they do. That is, the predicate of such a judgement is not identical to a part of the subject, even though intuition reveals that what the predicate refers to, is necessarily a part of the object the subject refers to. Maimon's paradigm is here the judgement that "the sum total of the angles of a triangle equals two right angels". What these judgements show, is that the *fact that* they apply to the objects they are about, depends, although for us in an incomprehensible way, upon a rule of the understanding that is used to construct the object in question. And it is this feature of synthetic judgements a priori that allows us to develop a notion of an answer to the *Quid facti* that is not based upon the contingency of the world of experience, but upon *an activity of the mind that, following a rule of the understanding, amounts to the construction of an object.*[19]

---

notion of meaningfulness that is derived from the idea of '*making* the world meaningful'. See the general remark at footnote 9.

[19] The point of this notion, in terms of *making* and *finding*, is that it aims to clarify the meaning of "the world" in '*making* the world meaningful', without the need to revert to a notion of the world that is derived from the idea of ' *finding* a meaningful world'. See the general remark at footnote 9.

As a consequence, it is, once more, possible to argue with Maimon in favour of the *Antinomy of Thought*; this time in favour of the antithesis of the second formulation. That is, the notion of a *'fact that'* under consideration is an essential precondition of real thought, in such a way that judgements that reveal this kind of *fact*, do really possess part of what is needed for a performance of real thought. Thus we are, once more, in a position to maintain that real thought is *really possible*, even though it might be that we will never be able to attain it.

In order to be able to understand the precise meaning of this consequence for Maimonian skepticism, it will be necessary to analyse the *Principle of Determinability*. But let me here, by way of summary, point out that, even though Maimonian skepticism can be correctly characterized as based upon the conviction that the human mind is unable to answer the *Quid facti*, it is nevertheless more than just a negative claim, because, as the case of mathematics shows, we can *understand the possibility of an answer to the Quid facti*. This means that an accurate characterization of Maimonian skepticism will have to take into account that it amounts to a defense of the *Antinomy of Thought*. Real thought would, in other words, really be expressed by judgements that provide both the *reason why* and the *fact that* they apply to the objects they are about. Unfortunately, however, in the case of a finite mind, an answer to the *Quid juris* implies the impossibility to answer the *Quid facti*, and vice versa. But what is important to realize is that this implication is, indeed, a *consequence* of the *finitude* of our minds: our possibilities are *limited*, but we have, nevertheless, the capacity to understand what it means to perform real thought. How we have to take this will emerge from my discussion of the *Principle of Determinability*, which is the topic of the following section.

2. The *Principle of Determinability*

A BASIC PROBLEM

In his *Logik*, Maimon introduces the *Principle of Determinability* as follows:

The first principle of all real thought (thought that determines objects) is, what I call, the *Principle of Determinability*.[20]

This poses an immediate problem for any interpretation of Maimon's philosophy that tends to stress the importance of the idea of an *Antinomy of Thought*. For, isn't the idea of a *Principle of Real Thought* actually incompatible with the idea of an *Antinomy of Thought*? Isn't it obvious that, once we are able to formulate a principle that governs an activity, we introduce the apparatus to solve any apparent antinomy concerning that activity? Or, the other way round, isn't it evident that, once we are able to prove an antinomy with respect to some activity, we, thereby, prove that there cannot be a principle that governs the activity in question? How, then, are we to understand the relation between Maimon's apparent defence of the *Antinomy of Thought* and his introducing the *Principle of Determinability* as if it were a *Principle of Real Thought*?

I will argue in this section that the tenor of these questions is misdirected. In order to account for the real inescapability of the *Antinomy of Thought*, Maimon needs to take refuge to the *Principle of Determinability*, because that is the only way to end up *with* the *Antinomy*, and not, merely, with some uninteresting kind of self-refuting skepticism.[21] To put it differently, I will argue that Maimon needs some kind of *Principle of Thought*, in order to account for an *Antinomy* that reflects *more* than just a contradiction *in* or *of* the account he gives. That is, if Maimonian skepticism is self-refuting, then this will not merely be a matter of a view that cannot be maintained, but rather a matter of the fact that it is a view that cannot be abandoned — not merely a matter of words, but as well a matter of what the words do stand for.[22]

---

20 "Der erste Grundsatz alles reellen, Objekt bestimmenden Denkens ist der von mir sogenannte *Satz der Bestimmbarkeit*.", *Logik*, p. 20.

21 Nathan Rotenstreich, in his description of Maimon's skepticism as occupying a special position within the history of skeptical ideas, makes roughly the same point. He writes: "such scepticism is explicitly formulated by reference to a definite, crystallized, cognitive ideal. Such scepticism accordingly implies the nonrealization of the ideal, not the self-contradiction or self-destruction of knowledge." Nathan Rotenstreich, "On the Position of Maimon's Philosophy", in *Review of Metaphysics 21*, 1968, p. 543

22 Both the propositions they express, and the reality they refer to.

AN EXPOSITION OF THE PRINCIPLE

Now, of course, this is a tough claim. Let me, therefore, argue for it with care, using Maimon's words as guides, beginning with the formulation of the *Principle of Determinability* that immediately follows the sentence I quoted just above:

> This [*Principle of Determinability*] is itself made up of two principles: 1) a principle which concerns the *subject* in general: Each subject should not only as a subject, but also in itself, be a possible object of consciousness; 2) a principle which concerns the *predicate*: Each predicate should not in itself, but as a predicate (related to the subject) be a possible object of consciousness. What does not conform to these principles might be just a *formal* or, perhaps, an *arbitrary*, but not a *real* thought.[23]

It is important to be aware of the fact that according to Maimon thought is nothing but the production of judgements, and, in addition, that he assumes that every judgement typically has a subject-predicate structure.[24] Thus, we should not think that Maimon is perhaps trying to formulate a rule of grammar. This will be even more clear, once we realize that the *Principle of Determinability* is not really about that what might occupy a position in a judgement, but is actually expressing the characteristics of a *relation of determinability*. We can see this perhaps more clearly in the notions that are based upon this *Principle*; i.e. the 'determinable' ('das Bestimmbare') and the determination ('die Bestimmung'). I already used them once or twice, calling the subject of a judgement the 'determinable', and the predicate the determination.

---

23 "Dieser [der Satz der Bestimmbarkeit] zerfällt wiederum in zwei andere Sätze: 1) in einen Satz fürs *Subjekt* überhaupt: Ein jedes Subjekt muß nicht nur als Subjekt, sondern auch an sich, ein möglicher Gegenstand des Bewußtseyns seyn; 2) in einen Satz fürs *Prädikat*: Ein jedes Prädikat muß nicht an sich, sondern als Prädikat (in Verbindung mit dem Subjekt) ein möglicher Gegenstand des Bewußtseyns seyn. Was nicht diesen Sätzen gemäß ist, kann ein bloß *formelles*, oder gar *willkührliches*, aber kein *reelles* Denken seyn." *Logik*, p. 20.

24 Cf. *Logik*, p. 248, "The entire affair of thought consists, as will be explained below, in judging. A judgement consists of two parts (subject and predicate) and their conjunction."; "Das ganze Geschäft des Denkens bestehet, wie weiterhin gezeigt werden soll, im Urtheilen. Ein Urtheil bestehet aus zwei Gliedern (Subjekt und Prädikat) und ihrer Verbindung mit einander (Kopula)."

Now the point of these notions and, thus, the point of the *Principle of Determinability*, is to account for the fact that there are representations that do stand in real relations, whereas there are others too that are not really related.

An example might help: the relation between 'green' and 'color' is of another kind than the relation between 'green' and 'grass'. According to Maimon, the first relation is a relation that is governed by the *Principle of Determinability*, whereas the second is not. That is, 'green' is a determination of 'color', because 'green' cannot be an object of consciousness on its own, but only as a predicate of 'color'. We cannot think of 'green' without, by that, thinking of 'color' as well, even in such a way that we think of 'green' as the determination and of 'color' as the 'determinable'. In contrast we can think of 'green' without, by that, thinking of 'grass' (imagine, for example, some kind of fancy Italian icecream, known as 'pistache'), just as we can think of 'grass' without, by that, thinking of 'green' (put up your tent in an alpine meadow, and imagine what the grass underneath looks like after a couple of weeks). Therefore, we cannot say that 'green' is a determination of 'grass', nor that 'grass' is a 'determinable' in relation to 'green'. Of course, this does not mean that there cannot be judgements in which 'green' occupies the position of the predicate, and 'grass' the position of the subject, but, and this is exactly what Maimon is driving at with his *Principle of Determinability*, such judgements cannot be taken to express a *real thought*.[25]

---

[25] For exegetical reasons it might be observed here that Maimon's distinction between determinations and 'determinables' resembles, but does not coincide, with W.E. Johnson's account of the relation between determinables and determinates. Johnson writes in his *Logic*, (Cambridge 1921) Part I, p. 174: "I propose to call such terms as colour and shape *determinables* in relation to such terms as red and circular which will be called *determinates*". The point of his distinction is two-fold: (a) some adjectives belong to one another because they have a real relation of difference to one another in such a way that they can take the place of one and the same more indeterminate adjective (red and blue, unlike red and circular, can both replace one and the same adjective, i.e.coloured); and, related, (b) some adjectives increase the determination of the subject-matter without increasing the number of adjectives (we know more of an object if it is said to be red than if it is said to be coloured, but there is no point in saying of a thing that it is both red and coloured since the latter adjective is already implied in the former). Maimon clearly is aware of the differences in logical function of the two kinds of adjectives (predicates) that Johnson observes, but what he attempts to do is to connect far-reaching metaphysical

A full appreciation of the idea that there are real relations of determinability, revealed by the *Principle of Determinability*, will only be possible by taking into account what, according to Maimon, is implied by this basic idea. In the first place there is the consequence that for every determination, there is one and only one 'determinable'.[26] That means that, for example, nothing can be green, except a color.[27] This consequence is implied by the fact that, if we are dealing with a real relation of determinability, it has to be the case that the determination implies the specific 'determinable' in question. Would it be possible for the determination to be a real determination of another 'determinable', this would imply that it was after all possible to think of the determination without, by that, implying the 'determinable' in question. Hence, it would not have been a real relation of determinability in the first place.

Though it is perhaps possible to accept this first consequence as implied by a rigorous conception of the purity of thought, it might be much harder to accept its reverse: that every 'determinable' can at one time have one and only one determination. And yet, this is implied too by the *Principle of Determinability*.[28] The point is as follows: if a real relation of determinability is only possible if being conscious of the determination implies a consciousness of the 'determinable', then although the 'determinable' is thinkable without this specific determination, it is *not* at the very moment of thinking the determination (that is, of forming the judgement that expresses the real relation of determinability between both). For, would it, then there would have to be two judgements the mind was conscious of at the very same moment: both judgements in which the same 'determinable' occupies the position of the subject. Such a coincidence implies, according to Maimon,

---

consequences to them, suggesting that these differences display a kind of deep structure present in our ways of judging (which is not merely a way of speaking but always also a way of encountering objects). The precise meaning of this idea of deep structure will be analysed in the following pages.

[26] Transscendentalphilosophie, pp. 86ff.

27 Or, as Maimon states it boldly: "it is just as impossible to think of a red body as it is to think of a sweet line."; "man kann so wenig einen rothen Körper als eine süße Linie denken." ibid. p. 93.

[28] *Logik*, pp. 187f.

that it would be possible to think of any one of these judgements, without, by that, having to think of the other. And that implies that this conjunction does not express a real relation of determinability; hence, that it is not one and the same 'determinable' that occupies in both judgements the position of the subject.[29]

Nonetheless, this second consequence seems to be rather counter-intuitive. After all, isn't it evident that we do think of complex objects, for example of red and round tomatos. Well, according to Maimon this is exactly what *isn't* evident, and just the mentioned kind of example might help to prove his point. For, tomatos are not red, but colors are; and neither are tomatos round: shapes are.[30] Thus, if we think of a red, round tomato, we have to presuppose the presence of representations that are the products of the imagination, associated with one another in a specific intuited spatio-temporal unity. The synthesis of these representations, in the idea of a tomato, is, so far, not at all a matter of real thought (that is, not at all a synthesis governed by the *Principle of Determinability*).

This suggests, however, a third consequence. The only possibility for us to think of complex objects now seems to be that we have to assume that representations are ordered in a hierachical, linear way. That is, if we cannot but think of 'round' by thinking of 'shape' as the 'determinable' 'round' is a determination of, then it might be that we are implicitly (or, as Maimon would say, *symbolically*), by thinking of 'shape', thinking of 'space' as well.[31] This is so because 'shape' and 'space' stand in a real relation of determinability, 'shape' being the determination and 'space' its 'determinable'. All this suggests that Maimon is thinking of linear chains of representations, of which every link is governed by the *Principle of Determinability*, such that the thought of the chain as a whole would amount to a complete concept of a real object. This is, indeed, a crucial aspect of Maimon's philosophy[32]. The idea is that we will be able to think the reality of a tomato,

---

[29] *Transscendentalphilosophie*, pp. 142-144.
[30] Cf. *Logik*, p. 188.
[31] *Logik*, pp. 31-32.
[32] It implies, according to Maimon, the idea of an infinite understanding. Cf. *Transscendentalphilosophie*, p. 248. There are informative resemblances between Leibniz' and Maimon's thoughts about the relation between the idea of an infinite understanding, the

once we are able to conceive a (presumably infinite) linear chain of subordinated representations (containing 'red', 'color', 'round', 'shape' and 'space', etc.) such that each link is governed by the Principle of Determinability. Our finitude exists precisely in our inability to attain the thought of such an infinitely long linear chain of representations.

Notwithstanding our impossibility to reach the completion of any concept of a real object, this idea of a linear chain of subordinated representations of which each link is governed by the *Principle of Determinability*, leads to a very important consequence. The point is that, despite the undeniable fact of our possibly overwhelming finitude, there is no *qualitative* difference between our finite kind of real thought, and the real thought of an infinite mind. Both will be build up from judgements that express real relations of determinability, the only difference being *quantitative*. Thus, whereas it will take an infinitely long time for us to attain the thought of an infinitely long chain of representations that stand in real relations of determinability, this will take just one timeless moment for an infinite mind.[33]

This is a very complex consequence. I will explain its tenor by discussing two closely related claims of Maimon, one being that judgements that express real thought have an *'analytic-synthetic'* character[34], the other that thought is *real* if it is concerned with the determinate object ('das bestimmte Objekt'), as the object referred to by a judgement that is governed by the *Principle of Determinability*[35].

In his *Kritische Untersuchungen über den menschlichen Geist*,[36] Maimon gives a clear statement of why he thinks that judgements that are governed by the *Principle of Determinability* have an 'analytic-synthetic' character:

---

concept of a real object and the infinite number of steps to be taken in an analysis of a contingent truth. See on this F. Kuntze, *Die Philosophie Salomon Maimons*, pp. 276, 307, 341; and S. Atlas, *From Critical to Speculative Idealism*, pp. 75f, pp. 79ff.

[33] Cf. *Transscendentalphilosophie*, p. 228. We should also understand Maimon's tendency to speak of our finite mind as if it is the *'Schema'* of the infinite mind, in this context. See *Transscendentalphilosophie*, p. 365, and *Kritische Untersuchungen*, p. 263.

[34] Cf.*Transscendentalphilosophie*, p. 107; *Kritische Untersuchungen*, p. 116, pp. 131-132.

[35] See, *Logik*, pp. 166-167.

[36] In this book Maimon presents a kind of popularization of his views, by means of a number of dialogues.

the construction of a straight line, as a *real object*, presupposes an *analytic-synthetic* judgement, because the *determination* of 'being-straight' cannot be an object of consciousness without the 'determinable' 'line'. Thus, in consciousness, the *predicate* is *analytically* related to the *subject*, not because of its concept but because of its existence, by way of the *judgement*, which is indeed not *expressed*, but nevertheless *presupposed*. In this *construction*, expressed by the judgement 'a line can be straight', 'line' and 'straight' are only related in a *synthetic* way, because in being conscious of a line it is not necessarily implied to be conscious of straightness. This *judgement*, therefore, is *analytic-synthetic*, if we take everything into account which is thought by means of this judgement. *Analytic* from the point of view of the *predicate*, and *synthetic* from the point of view of the *subject*.[37]

The point of this new characterization of a judgement that is governed by the *Principle of Determinability*, is that it allows us to understand *how* a synthetic judgement might, in the final analysis, turn out to be analytic, as must be the case with synthetic judgements a priori, if, that is, they will turn out to be judgements that express real thought. It allows us this understanding, because it assumes the possibility to approach a specific judgement from two different directions.

The most informative way to clarify this, is to imagine the judgement to be a link in a (perhaps infinite) chain, such that we can approach the specific judgement from, as it were, the direction of the most general 'determinable' (which is, according to Maimon, consciousness in general— "das Bewußtseyn überhaupt"[38]), and also from the other direction, that is, from the direction of the most specific

---

[37] "die *Konstruktion* einer geraden Linie, als *reelles Objekt*, setzt ein *analytisch-synthetisches* Urtheil voraus, indem die *Bestimmung* des Geradeseins nicht ohne das *Bestimmbare*: Linie, ein *Gegenstand des Bewußtseins* sein kann. Das *Prädikat* ist also mit dem *Subjekte*, nicht ihren *Begriffen* nach, sondern ihrem *Dasein* nach, im *Bewußtsein*, durch das *Urtheil*, das zwar nicht *ausgedrückt*, aber dennoch *vorausgesetzt* wird: das Geradesein ist nothwendig Linie, *analytisch* verbunden. In dem in dieser *Konstruktion* ausgedrückten Urtheile: eine Linie kann gerade sein, aber wird Linie mit Geradesein *synthetisch* verbunden, weil in dem Bewußtsein von Linie das Bewußtsein des Geradeseins nicht nothwendig enthalten ist. Dieses *Urtheil* ist also, wenn wir auf alles Rücksicht nehmen, was darin gedacht wird, *analytisch-synthetisch. Analytisch* von Seiten des *Prädikats*, und *synthetisch* von Seiten des *Subjekts*." *Kritische Untersuchungen*, pp. 131-132.

[38] *Logik*, pp. 244-245.

determination.[39] The former kind of approach is the approach according to which the specific judgement is synthetic. Thus, approaching the judgement as a judgement that states that a 'color' can be 'green', we realize that the judgement is synthetic, since it adds to 'color' the determination 'green', in an informative, but so far groundless way. Approaching the judgement, however, from the opposite direction, as a judgement that states that 'green' has to be a 'color', we realize that the judgement is analytic, since it reveals that the 'determinable' of 'green' is necessarily a 'color'.

Granted, now, that an infinite mind can think in one single moment an infinitely long chain of representations related by means of judgements that are governed by the *Principle of Determinability*, it is obvious that it makes no difference for an infinite mind whether it approaches any specific judgement from whatever direction. After all, it thinks the whole chain at once, such that it creates, by that very activity, both the *complete concept* and the *real object* it is the concept of. Hence, for the infinite mind, the chain as a whole is neither synthetic nor analytic, but, all the same, it is absolutely informative (creating an object *ex nihilo*) *and* absolutely necessary (completely governed, as it is, by a rule of the understanding).

Even though we, gifted with only a finite understanding, cannot approach a judgement from these two different directions at once, this makes not a difference at all with respect to the status of the judgements under consideration. Granted that a judgement is governed by the *Principle of Determinability*, it will express *real thought*, irrespective of the nature of the mind that is forming the judgement.

Roughly the same point can be stated in another way, by paying attention to the idea of a determinate object ('das bestimmte Objekt').

---

39 The "spatial metaphor" I introduce here, aims to make sense of the assumptions that all judgements have a subject-predicate structure and that all qualities have a place within a linear *genus-species* structure. These assumptions exhibit, as Samuel Atlas showed, the influence of Maimonides and Leibniz on Maimon's conception of the difference between the finite and the infinite mind. See S. Atlas, "Solomon Maimon's Doctrine of Infinite Reason and Its Historical Relations", in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 1952, pp. 178-182

Such an object is identified by a judgement[40], which is governed by the *Principle of Determinability*. Even though such a judgement takes almost everything about the object for granted (because it does not specify what the 'determinable' is supposed to be, but only that it is determined by the determination that occupies the position of the predicate), it nevertheless is, according to Maimon, a judgement about a *real* possibility, about an object that *can* be *real*. Therefore, the thought expressed by the judgement is a *real thought*.[41] Even though it expresses nothing but a tiny fragment of the concept of a *real object*, i.e. nothing but one link in a chain that it is infinitely long, it expresses nonetheless a link that *is* a *real part* of both the concept of a real object, and of the real object itself. In other words, *real thought* is a matter of stating syntheses that *are* links in chains that might be infinitely long to make up the complete concept of a real object. Whether or not we are able to attain such concepts is one thing; whether we are able to think real parts of such objects is quite another. And what Maimon is claiming, is that we can perform the latter, even though we may never be able to *complete* our thought of reality.

A DISTINCTION BASED UPON THE PRINCIPLE

We are now in a position to understand what Maimon means by claiming that the *Principle of Determinability* allows us to distinguish between judgements that are formal, judgements that are arbitrary and judgements that are real.

A formal judgement is one in which the predicate is a part of the subject. Such judgements are analytic in an uninteresting, tautological way. It is because of their formal structure that they are necessarily true, but they are, just because of that, unable to *determine* an object. Stated differently, they are true because of the Principle of Contradiction, not because of the *Principle of Determinability*. Since

---

[40] As we will see in the next chapter, any object is, according to Maimon, identified by means of a judgement and with respect to a conscious subject. See below, p. 138-139.
[41] *Logik*, pp. 166-167.

their formal structure is "ab = a"[42], they do not manifest a real relation of determinability. After all, it is not clear whether the predicate can only be an object of consciousness if, by that, the subject has to be an object of consciousness too. This is so, because it is not clear at all whether the subject can be a 'determinable' with respect to the predicate, since the subject is compound. Hence, it is itself the product of a judgement, and, if that judgement is not itself governed by the *Principle of Determinability*, the subject cannot be thought at all. That is, if the judgement that constructs the subject of the formal judgement, is itself not *real*, then the subject does not refer to a determinate object at all.

An example will clarify this straightaway. Suppose I think that a 'red smell' is 'red'. Now the judgement that expresses this thought is surely necessarily true. It is just true because of its formal structure. But even so, it is plain nonsense. 'Red' cannot be a determination of a 'red smell', because it is possible to think of 'red' without, by that, having to think of a 'red smell'. Even stronger, it is not possible at all to think of a 'red smell', since 'red' and 'smell' do not stand in any real relation of determinability. It follows, therefore, that a 'red smell' cannot be a 'determinable' with respect to 'red', for the simple fact that a 'red smell' cannot be a determinate object in the first place.

If one attempts to object, now, by pointing out that Maimon's favourite example of an analytic judgement is "a triangle has three sides", this will only help me make the point I try to make. Thus, not all analytic judgements are formal judgements, if only for the fact that all real judgements will, according to Maimon, turn out to be analytic. What would be a formal judgement in this case, and consequently not a real judgement, is "a space bounded by three sides has three sides". This judgement is merely true because of its formal structure, because, that is, of the Principle of Contradiction. That it, nevertheless, refers to a determinate object, an object that is determined by a judgement that is governed by the *Principle of Determinability*, is not a merit of the judgement, but only of the judgement that is implied by the subject of

[42] In concordance with Maimon's notation, this is the formal structure of sentences like "A pink elephant is pink". The '=' symbolizes the copula, not the mathematical 'is equal to'.

it. This judgement is: "a space can be bounded by three sides". This means that the judgement "a triangle has three sides" is not itself a real judgement; it *presupposes* a real judgement that makes the statement necessarily true. Because of that we can, notwithstanding its character, maintain that it is a judgement that expresses knowledge; according to Maimon, analytic knowledge.[43]

This analysis of a formal judgement, in terms of its not being governed by the *Principle of Determinability*, explains why one of the extreme kinds of judgements discussed in the previous section, is not able to express real thought (the analytic judgements a priori, that possess a *formal* necessity, because their predicate is identical to a part of their subject). Now we can see why, as I argued there, the *reason why* these judgements apply to the objects they are about, is not good enough to account for the *reason why* real thought applies to the objects it is about. For, either they do not provide a reason at all (in the case of red smells being red), or they presuppose it (in the case of a triangle having three sides).

Just such an explanation can be given too of why the other extreme kind of judgement (the synthetic judgements a posteriori, that are merely *arbitrary*, because they consist of a synthesis of a subject with a predicate that do not have anything to do with one another) is not able to express real thought. As I argued above, these judgements do not provide a notion of the *fact that* they apply to the objects they are about, that is good enough to account for the *fact that* real thought applies to the objects it is about. An analysis in terms of its not being governed by the *Principle of Determinability* can explain why this is so.

Arbitrary judgements express syntheses between two representations that do not have any kind of relation to one another. That is to say, both of them can be an object of consciousness by themselves, i.e. without, by thinking of it, having to think of the other. One of Maimon's favourite examples is rather provocative: "sugar is sweet". The point is that we can think of the predicate 'sweet' without, by that, having to think of 'sugar'. Hence, 'sugar' cannot be the 'determinable' of 'sweet'. The only kind of representation we *have to* think of, by

---

[43] *Logik*, pp. 122-123.

thinking of sweet, is 'taste'. That is, 'taste' and 'sweet' stand in a real relation of determinability; 'taste' being the 'determinable', 'sweet' its determination.

The temptation to object that we, nevertheless, cannot think of 'sugar' without, by that, having to think of 'sweet', implies the suggestion that perhaps 'sugar' is the determination, and 'sweet' its 'determinable'. But this surely is not what is meant by the judgement that "sugar is sweet". That is, this judgement does not express a way in which 'sweet' might be determined by 'sugar', because 'sugar' is not a determination of anything. It is, instead, at most a name for a class of 'objects' that share a number of determinations. As such it resembles, according to Maimon, such incomprehensible 'objects' as 'red smells'. Or, to put it differently, 'sugar' is the name for a kind of object that we can only identify in space and time (in experience)[44], not by means of an intelligible chain of representations. For the chain that will make up the idea of sugar, consists of such unrelated determinations as 'sweet', 'soluble', 'crystal-shaped', etc. Hence, if it seems undeniably true that "sugar is sweet", then this is presumably a consequence of the fact that we take for granted that 'sugar' is the determinate object referred to by a judgement like "the crystal-shaped thing that is sweet, soluble, etc.". Thus, the judgement is, as a judgement, at most true because it is in fact a formal judgement: "the thing that is sweet, etc. is sweet". However, as we saw above, such judgements are not able to express real thought.

And actually, it is unlikely that we will reason in this direction, if we were to defend the truth of "sugar is sweet". It is more likely that we will try to point out that the judgement states a *fact*. But then it states this fact in an incomprehensible way, giving expression to a synthesis we might perhaps experience in space and time, but which we cannot understand as governed by a rule of the understanding. The notion of the *fact that* such a judgement applies to the object it is about is therefore not good enough, since we do not have any guarantee that the judgement does *in fact* refer to a determinate object at all. It might

---

[44] In Maimon's terminology 'sugar' is an *object determined outside of thought*. See above, Chapter Four, pp. 65-67, and below, Chapter Six, section 2, pp. 138-146.

indeed as well be the case that there is no more than an arbitrary coincidence between, on the one hand, the experience of a specific spatio-temporal unity (over there, at this very moment, in the sugar bowl) and, on the other hand, the occurrence of a judgement that expresses a synthesis between 'sugar' and 'sweet'.[45] After all, there is nothing in 'sugar' nor in 'sweet' that gives us any reason to believe that the judgement expresses a real relation of determinability.

So far, then, the *Principle of Determinability* does indeed explain why the two extreme kinds of judgements we are able to produce, cannot express real thought. But can the *Principle* also explain why the two remaining kinds of judgements (the synthetic judgements a priori that do exist in mathematics, and should exist in physics) *might* express real thought?

Maimon gives a positive answer to this question, an answer that needs careful treatment. For all emphasis has to be on *'might'*: the *Principle of Determinability* does not explain why synthetic judgements a priori do express real thought, but merely why they *might* express it. Or, to say it in another way, the *Principle of Determinability* helps us to identify the kinds of judgements thought needs in order to realize the *possibility* of its being *real thought*. Let us first consider the case of mathematics. As we saw above, there are mathematical statements that are synthetic judgements a priori, and they give expression to the necessity of the *fact that* they apply to the objects they are about, even though they do not provide the *reason why* they apply. Thus, it appears to be the case that we can *find* a meaningful world by means of these judgements, even though we are not in a position to understand this world by means of these judgements. Using the *Principle of Determinability*, this can be analysed in the following way.

Consider the judgement "the sum of the angles of a triangle equals two right angles". Clearly we can think of the subject (i.e. 'the sum of the angles of a triangle') without having to think of the predicate (i.e. 'equals two right angles'). So, from the point of view of the subject there is at least a chance that it stands in a real relation of determin-

[45] As we will see in the next chapter, Maimon assumes that this coincidence is the result of our imagination. See below, pp. 143-144.

ability with respect to the predicate. After all, the *Principle of Determinability* states no more about the 'determinable' than that it must be possible to think of it without, by that, having to think of the determination. We can, however, think of the predicate as well, without, by that, having to think of the subject. Therefore it rather seems to be the case that we are dealing here with a judgement that is just arbitrary, a judgement that tries to state a fact that might as well be otherwise. Or in other words, from the point of view of the predicate it does not seem to be the case that the judgement is governed by the *Principle of Determinability*. After all, the *Principle* states that it has to be impossible to think of the predicate without, by that, having to think of the subject, in order for a predicate to be a determination (i.e. to stand in a real relation of determinability with respect to the subject). Thus, the *Principle* does not govern this judgement.

Nevertheless, we cannot *prove* that the *Principle of Determinability* does *not* govern judgements like these. This follows, according to Maimon, from the evident impossibility to *construct* a triangle such that the sum of its angles does not equal two right angles. The object the judgement is about makes the judgement necessarily true, and we can convince ourselves of that, because we possess of any mathematical object the rule for constructing it. Thus, every time we construct a triangle (every time we delineate a space by three lines), we will discover that one of the determinations of it is that the sum of its angles equals two right angles. It is just because of this fact that Maimon assumes that mathematical judgements provide an answer to the *Quid facti*. That they do not answer the *Quid juris* follows from the fact that we are unable to understand why the determination is a determination of the 'determinable'. That is, from the point of view of the determination it is absolutely unclear that there is a real relation of determinability involved. But from the point of view of the 'determinable' (not considered as the subject of a judgement, but as the determinate object the judgement is about) it is absolutely self-evident that it must be a real relation of determinability.

The result of this analysis is that mathematical judgements would, indeed, be governed by the *Principle of Determinability*, if that would only mean that the subject-term refers to a real 'determinable' with res-

pect to the predicate. This presupposes, however, that it is possible to *transform* the part of the *Principle* that concerns the predicate into a part that concerns the subject. The necessity provided by the impossibility to think of the predicate without, by that, having to think of the subject, must now be provided by the 'determinable' considered as a determinate object. According to Maimon, this is possible in the case of mathematics, because we possess the rule for constructing mathematical objects, that is, we can turn the 'determinable' into a determinate object just on our own. Therefore we are able to discover whether the subject of a mathematical judgement stands in a real relation of determinability with the predicate.

From the point of view of the predicate, however, we are unable to recognize this relation. But still, to make the idea of this analysis explicit, it just may be that there is *a missing link* that would reveal that synthetic judgements a priori in mathematics *are* governed by the *Principle of Determinability*, even though we are unable to find it. All our knowledge of the subject points into that direction, into the direction of the hidden existence of some kind of missing link, but since we are unable to find it, we can do no more than pointing out that these judgements *might* be governed by the *Principle of Determinability*.[46]

Before discussing the last part of Maimon's explanation of synthetic judgements a priori in terms of the *Principle of Determinability*, it will be fruitful to pause a moment and consider the effect of the nineteenth century invention of non-Euclidean geometry (of which Maimon was evidently ignorant) on Maimon's explanation of thoughts concerning mathematical objects. One might say that these kinds of geometry show that we can, after all, *prove* that the *Principle of Determinability* does *not* govern some or all of the judgements concerning mathematical objects. One should then point out that since the rule for con-

---

[46] Thus, an account of thinking in terms of *finding* cannot account for the *intelligibility* of the world. It can only express our hope for such an intelligibility, but, and this is the core of Maimonian skepticism taken as a refutation of dogmatism, we are not allowed to assume this intelligibility. I will deal with the refutation of dogmatism in the next chapter. See also note 50, below.

structing for example a triangle assumes unwarrantly the *uniqueness*[47] of Euclidean geometry, we might, once we accept another kind of geometry, succeed in constructing triangles such that the sum of its angles does not equal two right angles. Such an insight does not show that Maimon's analysis fails, however, but only shows that the *missing link* I spoke about is in these cases uncovered by the invention of non-Euclidean geometry, and as it turned out to be this link is not governed at all by the *Principle of Determinability*, but is merely a formal link producing the uninformative, arbitrary kind of necessity I discussed above.[48]

The point is nevertheless instructive, since it helps us understand the difference between Maimonian skepticism and a mere agnosticism. The latter kind of position holds that we should not make claims about our being able or unable to form judgements that express real thought at all, because our human finitude precludes our being able to distinguish between judgements that express real thought and judgements that don't. Maimonian skepticism, however, helps us state our position a bit more precisely. After all, we do know how to distinguish judgements that express real thought from judgements that don't, since we do understand the *Principle of Determinability*. Therefore we can make claims about the possibility that we do form judgements that express real thought – namely, all those judgements that seem to be synthetic a priori. But, more importantly, Maimonian skepticism allows us to claim that we are able to know which judgements do *not* express real thought[49] – namely, all those judgements that are not governed by the *Principle of Determinability*; for example (as we know since the invention of non-Euclidean geometry) all those judgements about mathematical objects that unwarrantly assume the uniqueness of Euclidean geometry.

---

[47] This argument is reminiscent of Körner's argument against the possibility of transcendental deductions. See his "The Impossibility of Transcendental Deductions", in *Kant Studies Today*, ed. L.W. Beck, 1969, pp. 230-244.

[48] See pp. 102-103.

[49] As I observed in note 5 above, this is the point of Maimon's criticism of Aenesidemus' kind of skepticism.

Let us now turn to the case of synthetic judgements a priori in physics (i.e. with respect to the objects of experience), in which case we may find the same kind of explanation as in the case of mathematics, though it proceeds in the opposite direction. That is, the analysis of this kind of judgement in terms of the *Principle of Determinability* could be based upon the possibility to transform the part of the *Principle* that concerns the 'determinable' into a part that concerns the determination. We have to be well aware, in this case, of the hypothetical character of this analysis, since for Maimon there are actually no synthetic judgements a priori with respect to the objects of experience.[50] Nevertheless, the proposed analysis is of utmost importance for his skepticism, because we can only claim that there are no such judgements if we know what they have to look like.

Well, consider the judgement "'grass' and 'green' stand in a relation of 'substance' and 'attribute' to one another". Because they are categories, we cannot, according to Maimon, think of 'substance' and 'attribute' without, by that, having to think of objects to which they apply. This is so because the categories are merely *"Verhältnißbegriffe"*, they are not themselves objects, but only possible objects of consciousness *as* the ways in which objects of consciousness can be related.[51] The categories are the most fundamental determinations ("Elementarprädikate aller reellen Objekte"[52]) and therefore, any thought of a category must, actually, be a thought about other objects. That is, we *must* think of them as *determinations*, which implies that we must think of their 'determinables' as well — this follows from the *Principle of Determinability*. But, and here again we are confronted with the mystery of our having finite minds, these 'determinables' are not *given* together with our being conscious of the categories as determinations. To be sure, many objects are given to us by means of the intuition. But

---

[50] Einstein's relativization of Newton's physics does not, because of this hypothetical character, concern Maimon's analysis as much as the relativization of Euclidean geometry I discussed above. Of course, both relativizations are equally important to investigations of *Kant's* theory of synthetic judgements a priori, but since Maimon is a skeptic with respect to synthetic judgements a priori in physics he has as it were left the scene before the general theory of relativity makes its point.

[51] *Logik*, p. 185.

[52] *Logik*, p. 155.

there is not one specific object of experience which qualifies as a 'determinable' with respect to the categories.

Thus, even though we cannot think of 'substance' without having to think of an object that is a 'substance', it is not clear at all whether 'grass' is such a substance. As an empirical object 'grass' is nothing but an arbitrary name for something identified in space and time (in an act of intuition by someone, somewhere, sometime); not at all in any clear sense a 'determinable'. Likewise, we cannot think of 'attribute' without, by that, having to think of an object[53], but it is not clear at all, in experiencing that grass is green, that 'green' is an attribute. 'Green', too, is actually nothing but an arbitrary name for something identified in space and time.

However, there is a difference between 'green' and 'grass', since in thinking of 'green' we have to think of 'color' as well. This is so because the relation between 'green' and 'color' is, as we have seen above, a real relation of determinability; i.e. a relation governed by the *Principle of Determinability*. It is because of this relation of determinability, Maimon stresses, that we are allowed to state that 'green' is an attribute with respect to 'color', and 'color', consequently, a substance with respect to 'green'. Maimon's point here is that the categories can be deduced from the *Principle of Determinability* —not only the categories of relation but also those of quantity, quality and modality.[54]

In two different ways does this line of argument support Maimon's claim that it is because of the *Principle of Determinability* that synthetic judgements a priori might be possible with respect to the objects of experience. On the one hand the *Principle* explains our being in possession of the categories, and on the other hand it points out the kind of judgements that are the basic parts of real thought. And even though it is true that these latter kind of judgements (for example, the one that expresses the real relation of determinability between 'color' and

---

[53] I use this notion here in a technical sense: everything one can make a judgement about is, according to Maimon, a logical object. Thus, even the letter 'h' can be an object, or the character '#', since I can form the judgement "'h' is a letter", or even "# is #". Cf. *Logik* , pp. 172-173; and below, Chapter Six, pp. 138f.

[54] *Logik* , pp. 153-170.

'green') are not about the objects of experience, they are, nevertheless, about *possible* objects that are *real parts* of the objects of experience. And, moreover, even though *we* are not capable to understand how to build up the objects of experience out of these real parts of them, there does not seem to be any reason why the ultimate syntheses that constitute the *complete* object (syntheses we don't understand) will *not* be build up out of the syntheses that constitute their parts (syntheses we do understand).

Thus, while it is not possible to claim that there are synthetic judgements a priori in physics that express real knowledge about specific (kinds of) empirical objects (like "'grass' and 'green' stand in a relation of 'substance' and 'attribute' to one another"), it is nevertheless true that there *might* be. It appears to be the case that we could *make* the world meaningful by means of these judgements, if only we could formulate them; i.e. if we were able to understand the relation between the subject and the predicate as a real relation of determinability. As we saw in the case of mathematics, even though we were unable to *understand* the relation between, for example, 'the sum of the angles of a triangle' and 'two right angles' in this way, we were, according to Maimon, nevertheless able to *discover* their relation as a real relation of determinability, because we were able to *construct* a triangle. Now, according to Maimon, Kant assumed something like that in the case of the objects of experience, although in the opposite direction. Because Kant was not aware of the consequences of this change in direction, he could, erroneously, assume that there *are* synthetic judgements a priori in physics.

The point is this. In mathematics we can, as we have seen above, create an intuition of the determinate object by means of a rule of the understanding we possess once we think of the 'determinable'. Accordingly, mere knowledge of the 'determinable' is sufficient, in mathematics. Likewise, it is Kant's suggestion that we can create, in the case of physics, an intuition of the determinate object by means of a rule of the understanding once we think of the determination (being a category). The reason for this is accepted by Maimon, as I just stated, it being that we *have to* think of 'determinables' once we think of the categories. But even though we *have to*, it does not follow, Maimon

argues, that the content of the categories is rich enough to allow us to create intuitions of objects that are the *determinate objects* of the judgements in which the categories function as predicates. Indeed the content of the categories is *not* rich enough, according to Maimon, and therefore we have to rely on *objects determined outside of thought* to occupy the position of the subject in judgements of which the position of the predicate is occupied by a category. These *objects determined outside of thought* are given to us by intuition. Hence, their origin does not lie in a rule of the understanding we possess once we think of the categories. Therefore, Maimon argues, Kant did not answer the *Quid facti* at all. For it is this question that arises as soon as we make judgements in which distinct faculties are responsible for the representations that occupy the positions of subject and predicate.

With respect to the relation between the *Principle of Determinability* and the last kind of judgements we are able to produce, we can now draw the following conclusion. If it was possible to transform the part of the *Principle of Determinability* that concerns the 'determinable' into a part that concerns the determination, i.e. if it was possible to create an intuition of the determinate object by means of merely being in possession of a category (a determination *per se*), then there would have existed synthetic judgements a priori in physics. Because this isn't the case, we have to rely on intuition in order to think of an object that might occupy the position of the subject. As a consequence, we are confronted with the *Quid facti*: does the synthesis produced by a judgement which combines elements that stem from different faculties *in fact* apply to the determinate object it is supposed to be about? And as long as we don't know the answer to this question, we can claim no more than that it *might be possible* that there are synthetic judgements a priori with respect to objects of experience.[55]

---

[55] Thus, an account of thinking in terms of *making* cannot account for the fact that it is *the world* we are thinking of. It can only express our hope for it being the world that we are able to think of, but as before, and this is as well the core of Maimonian skepticism as a refutation of dogmatism, we are not allowed to assume that it is the world that we are thinking of. This refutation of dogmatism is the subject-matter of the next chapter. See also note 45, above.

THE PRINCIPLE AND THE ANTINOMY

Now that I finished my exposition of Maimon's *Principle of Determinability* and the possibilities it generates to specify what is meant by real thought, it is important to return to the problem I set out at the beginning of this section: what are we to think of a philosopher who defends the inevitability of an *Antinomy of Thought* by means of an analysis based upon a *Principle of Thought*? Is it indeed true, as I suggested, that such a *Principle* is needed in order to be able to explain why we are confronted with such an *Antinomy*? And if so, does my exposition help to make this point?

Let me begin by restating the reason for my suggestion. What Maimon is arguing for is not for some kind of *contradiction*, but for an *Antinomy*. The difference between these is that a contradiction functions at the level of *language*, whereas an *Antinomy* functions at the level of *understanding*.[56] Now, one way to see the possibility of this distinction, is to argue that there is, besides the Principle of Contradiction, some kind of 'Principle of Understanding', which can solve the contradiction by showing that one of the contradicting sentences is false. If we want to be able to get rid of contradictions, we need some such principle, since the Principle of Contradiction is itself nothing but a formal principle, enabling us no more than the identification of contradictions, not their resolution. And of course we all do assume some such principle, calling it 'truth' most of the time, implying some kind of accessibility of reality.

But now, it might be the case that this 'Principle of Understanding' generates 'contradictions', that is, that some of its implications are incompatible with one another. As a consequence we have to distinguish between these latter 'contradictions' and the former ones, since we can, by means of the 'Principle' in question, solve the former, but not, by definition, the latter. These latter ones are, what I call, *antinomies*. Of course, it is only natural to distrust a 'Principle of Understanding' that generates antinomies, since these are incomprehensible, implying that at least the name of the 'Principle of Understanding' seems to be inap-

[56] In this respect antinomies are like paradoxes.

propriate. But as long as we are unable to find another 'Principle of Understanding' which turns the antinomies into ordinary contradictions, we do not seem to have any alternative but to accept the proposed, problematical 'Principle'.

Maimon's *Principle of Determinability* is meant to be such a problematical 'Principle of Understanding', or, as he would say, *Principle of Thought*. It can solve contradictions insofar as it helps identify judgements that are formal or arbitrary, judgements that might be discarded because they do not express a real relation of determinability. Thus, contradictions like "the tomato is red and the tomato is not red" are dissolved, because, since 'red' and 'tomato' do not stand in a real relation of determinability, none of the statements expresses a real thought.

Besides this success in identifying judgements that *do not* express a real relation of determinability, there is the failure of the impossibility to understand the identification of judgements that do express a real relation of determinability, *without* ending up with an antinomy: the *Antinomy of Thought*. That is, we know what we have to look for, in trying to find judgements that express real relations of determinability, but we cannot formulate the requirements such a judgement has to satisfy, without running into the incomprehensibilities of contradicting ourselves. This is, according to Maimon, a consequence of our having a finite mind. From the point of view of an infinite mind, the requirements for real thought are perfectly clear. Let me explain this.

Our having a finite mind consists for Maimon in our thought evolving through time, which means that we are conscious of our representations one after another. The series of our representations would, according to Maimon, be a performance of real thought if any sequence of representations would be governed by the *Principle of Determinability*. But, since our mind is finite, these sequences are one-directional: of every two representations one precedes the other. And this leads us to the *Antinomy of Thought*. This is so because the *Principle of Determinability* consists of two parts, which apply to different representations (the subject and the predicate), but which express conditions that must be satisfied *at one and the same moment*, in order for the judgement that establishes a synthesis between the representations in

question, to be understood as a judgement that expresses a real relation of determinability. We have seen that this is, according to Maimon, no problem at all for an infinite mind, because such a mind thinks of an infinitely long chain of representations *at one and the same moment*, therefore being able to satisfy at once, with respect to any link in the chain, the two conditions involved.

We can now understand why the second formulation of the *Antinomy of Thought* follows from the structure of synthetic judgements a priori. As we have seen, synthetic judgements a priori would exist if the two parts of the *Principle of Determinability* could be reformulated as both applying to only one of the representations involved. In such a way the *Principle* would have been accomodated to suit the human condition, i.e. to suit a mind that is finite, that has to proceed from one *given* representation to the next. That is, if both conditions concern the progress from one representation to another, both conditions can be satisfied *at one and the same moment*, i.e. in one and the same move.

In the case of mathematics, we have according to Maimon the possibility to satisfy both conditions by means of our consciousness of the 'determinable', since this consciousness implies a rule for the construction of the determinate object the 'determinable' refers to.[57] In the case of physics we have, according to Kant (at least as Maimon understands him), the possibility to satisfy both conditions by means of our consciousness of the determination (being a category). But, as we have seen, Maimon argues that Kant is wrong in this respect.[58]

In both cases, however, can we notice the seeds of the *Antinomy of Thought*. For in mathematics the relation of determinability between, for example, 'the sum of the angles of a triangle' and 'two right angles' is *mediated* by a determinate object (a specific triangle). To hold that it is, nevertheless, the *Principle of Determinability* which governs the relation between 'determinable' and determination, means to minimize

---

[57] In other words, in mathematics we *find* a world that appears to be *intelligible*, because our *finding* it follows from our *constructing* it.

[58] Thus, Kant thinks that the world we *make* meaningful, is bound to be *the* world (of appearances), but, according to Maimon, Kant mistakenly assumes this. So construed, Maimon foreshadowed Thomas Nagel's argument against Kant's 'humanism'. See above, Chapter Three, pp. 35-38. See also my discussion of Maimon's argument against Kant's "empirical dogmatism" in the following chapter, pp. 153-161.

the mediating function of the determinate object. Maimon assumes that this is possible, by assuming that the specific size of the sides of the triangle (generated by the imagination) do not really matter.[59] Such a move, however, implies that, somehow, the 'determinable' is identical with the determinate object, but if so, it becomes quite impossible to hold that we can think of the 'determinable' without, by that, having to think of the determination. After all, in that case to think of the 'determinable' means to think of the determinate object, and, thus, to think of the determination. Therefore, it is only as finite minds (assuming that the determinate object is, partly, a product of the imagination) that we can understand the working of the *Principle of Determinability* —that we can make sense of the part of the *Principle* that concerns the 'determinable'.

But, making sense of this requirement, implies, from the point of view of a finite mind, at the same time the impossibility to make sense of the part of the *Principle* that in its original formulation concerns the determination. For, now that we, as finite minds, accept the mediating role of the determinate object, it becomes impossible to see that we cannot think of the determination without, by that, having to think of the 'determinable'. The relation between the determinate object and the determination turns out to have a formal character: "this specific triangle of which, among other things, the sum of the angles equals two right angles, is such that the sum of the angles equals two right angles". The fact that each time we construct a triangle our imagination fills in the variables in the rule for constructing it in such a way that this formal judgement follows, remains necessarily something beyond our understanding.[60] That is exactly what is meant by Maimon's claim that synthetic judgements a priori in mathematics have an answer to the *Quid facti*, but fail to answer the *Quid juris*. Given our finite minds, that is, given that we proceed from representation to representation in a

---

[59] It is in this context that we can understand Maimon's notoriously obscure 'Doctrine of Differentials'. See for an account Bergman's study on Maimon's philosophy, pp. 59-68.

[60] In his exposition of what the radicalization of phenomenology in France is supposed to be, Descombes refers to this kind of argument, by accident using the very same example. Cf. Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 99.

one-directional way, it is the possibility to answer the *Quid facti* which implies the impossibility to answer the *Quid juris*.[61]

The case of synthetic judgements a priori in physics (would they exist) gives us this same implication the other way round. Here we start from our being conscious of a category, which should lead us to representations of the objects of experience in a one-directional way governed by the *Principle of Determinability*. The fact that the categories are *'Verhältnißbegriffe'* implies, as we have seen, that we can only think of them as being determinations of the ways in which other representations are related. This means two things that are mutually incompatible. On the one hand, being conscious of a determination implies being conscious of its 'determinable', but on the other hand, the fact that the categories are *'Verhältnißbegriffe'*, implies that they do not themselves lead to any representations. These two things are nothing but the two requirements of the *Principle of Determinability* both applied to the possibility of a mental state that is a consciousness of a category.

It is only because of the finitude of our minds that such a mental state can occur on its own. And it is only because of that occurrence that we can understand the dynamics of our stream of consciousness. Thus, the possibility of a mental state which is a consciousness of a category produces the idea of necessary sequences of mental states. That is why Maimon claims that the idea of a synthetic judgement a priori in physics entails an answer to the *Quid juris*.

But all the same, it is not our being conscious of a category that leads to the following phase in the sequence. Since the categories are merely *'Verhältnißbegriffe'*, we need the mediating function of the imagination, to come from the consciousness of a category to the consciousness of an object that might stand to the category as a 'determinable' stands to its determination. But it is exactly because of this mediation by the imagination that the relation between the 'determinable' and the determination (being a category), turns out to be nothing more than an arbitrary conjunction between two representations that have nothing to

---

[61] It is in this way that Maimon's analysis helps us to understand why the meaning of "meaningful" in an account of thinking conceived as '*finding* a meaningful world' will remain a problem.

do with one another. Which means that, after all, the posibility to understand the idea of a necessary sequence of representations (generating an answer to the *Quid juris*) implies the impossibility to answer the *Quid facti*.[62]

Therefore, we may conclude that the *Principle of Determinability* leads to the *Antinomy of Thought* as soon as it has to be used by a finite mind; i.e. a mind that proceeds in a one-directional way from representation to representation. Because the *Principle* consists of two conditions, one with respect to the subject and one with respect to the predicate, which both must be satisfied in order for a judgement to express a real relation of determinability, it leads to the *Antinomy of Thought*. It does so because the conditions demand opposing directions of proceeding from representation to representation, which is impossible for a finite mind to do *at one and the same moment*.

To conclude, however, that we arrive at a comprehensive account of thinking once we accept that the relation between thoughts and objects will remain a problem, means presumably to elicit the following kind of questions. Wouldn't I have to agree that any account of whatsoever is unacceptable as long as it implies an inescapable problem? Can we claim to have *understood* anything as long as it continues to challenge us with incomprehensibilities? If skepticism has the last word, will we not necessarily be lost in absolute ignorance? And doesn't this imply that skepticism just cannot be defensible? These questions introduce the voice of dogmatism. I will dispute it in the next chapter, arguing that these questions are misdirected, thereby reinforcing my claim that an adequate account of thinking will have to take the form of a problem.

---

[62] It is in this way that Maimon's analysis helps us to understand why the meaning of "the world" in an account of thinking conceived as '*making* the world meaningful' will remain a problem.

CHAPTER SIX

THE FAILURE OF DOGMATISM

1. Introducing the dogmatic option

Dogmatism isn't in the air nowadays—or, so it seems. Unlike its counterpart, skepticism, it didn't survive the eigthteenth century. Probably not because of Maimon's, or for that matter, Kant's criticism of it. No, as Beiser aptly observes[1], dogmatism was a relic of a passing age. It was more than just a philosophical issue, losing esteem by the *guillotine*, rather than by the arguments of Kant or any other philosopher. The choice for or against dogmatism was, at the close of the eightteenth century, a choice for or against the *ancien régime.*

Still, this chapter will not be about eightteenth century politics nor about eightteenth century philosophy. To be sure, it will be about Maimon's criticism of dogmatism, but in the composition of my argument, this criticism is meant to strenthen my claim that the structure of our articulations of thinking has an aporetic character. Hence, this chapter has a systematic tenor. It is about a problem that emerged out of the eightteenth century, not one that perished with it. And so it is about dogmatism, although this strain of thought nowadays appears under different names.[2]

---

[1] Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason* , pp.197-198.

[2] be it scientific, constitutive, internal realism or conceptual idealism.

At the close of the eigtheenth century 'dogmatism' was mainly a polemical notion, used by the Kantians as a nickname for the Wolffians, who took it as a title.[3] It must, therefore, have been confusing to both parties that Maimon accused the Kantians of being "empirical dogmatists"[4], and for both it will have been one more reason to regard his individuality as intractability.[5] Nevertheless, Maimon's use of the notion of 'dogmatism' was much more specific and coherent than common usage. According to him 'dogmatism' is not a theory concerning our knowledge of God, the Soul and the World; it is not a theory that secures the possibility of metaphysics, nor just a theory that asserts that *verités de faits* are governed by a principle of sufficient reason, nor even a theory that holds that the principles of thought are, in effect, principles of being. To be sure, some Wolffians might have held some of these theories[6], and some people might have labeled one or any combination of these 'dogmatism', but such facts never were of any interest to Maimon. He was too much of a "Selbstdenker"; in his hands 'dogmatism' turned out to be a theoretical option with respect to what he judged to be the *real* philosophical challenge: how to account for *the Antinomy of Thought*. And, with respect to this *Antinomy*, both Kant and the Wolffians somehow argued for the same option, namely, that the *Antinomy of Thought* could not be the last word about the relation between thoughts and objects. If there were an *Antinomy* at all, it could be resolved.

In order to clarify this dogmatic option, I will concentrate on the first formulation of the *Antinomy of Thought*:

---

[3] According to Kant a philosophy is dogmatic if it starts with metaphysics, without first developing a "Kritik der Verstandesvermögen". See "Ueber eine Entdeckung" in Akademie Ausgabe Vol. 8 p. 229. The Wolffians replied in a number of ways, arguing either that Kant's criticism needed a dogmatic metaphysics, or that Leibniz himself had already developed a critique of reason. See Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, pp. 193-225.

[4] Maimon, *Transscendentalphilosophie*, p. 434.

[5] See, Ernst Cassirer, *Das Erkenntnisproblem*, Vol. 3, p. 81: "So erschien (...) seine [Maimon's] gedankliche Eigenart bald als Eigensinn."

[6] See Beiser, ibid.

(1) Thesis: Real thought will only be real thought if it determines its object according to rules of the understanding.

Antithesis: Real thought will only be real thought if its object is given to thought as determined outside of thought.

According to this formulation, as I explained in Chapter Four, the structure of our accounts of thinking has an aporetic character because the objects of thought must be taken to be both *objects determined by thought* and *objects determined outside of thought*—which is for us, finite minds, incomprehensible because we cannot understand the possibility of an identity between these two notions. The dogmatic option, at least as Maimon conceives it, now is to challenge this last claim. That is, according to Maimon, dogmatism amounts to nothing but the claim that we are justified in assuming that an identity between *objects determined by thought* and *objects determined outside of thought* obtains.

In order to be able to understand the precise impact of this option, and to understand in what way both Kant and the Wolffians might, according to Maimon, be regarded as advocates of dogmatism, it is necessary to analyse at length the notion of an *object determined outside of thought*. This will be done in the next section. In this introductory section it will suffice to remember that for Maimon both *objects determined outside of thought* and *objects determined by thought* are *intentional objects*. This means that the dogmatic identity-thesis is not going to be, in any traditional, pre-Kantian sense, an *ontological* thesis about reality as such. Nor will it for that matter be, in any Kantian sense, a strictly *epistemological* thesis about the forms of knowledge. Being a thesis about *intentional objects*, dogmatism will be a thesis about the *commensurability* of thought and reality, whatever the epistemological or ontological status of either one. That is, although *objects determined outside of thought* are identified by another kind of *mental state* than *objects determined by thought*, both kinds of *objects* will, in the final analysis, turn out to have the very same structure, such that it will ultimately be possible to identify any specific *object determined*

outside of thought with a specific *object determined by thought. That* is the identity-thesis Maimon attributes to dogmatism, be it in its "empirical" (as it is with Kant), or its "transcendental" (as it is with the Wolffians) variant.

The impact of this thesis on my claim that the relation between thoughts and objects will remain a problem, is considerable. If indeed any *object determined outside of thought* might be identified with a specific *object determined by thought*, then the aporetic character of the structure of our articulations of thinking is, after all, just a matter of inadequate accounts. Stated differently, if dogmatism is possible, then the *Antinomy of Thought* is resolvable—i.e. not an inevitable consequence of the radical finitude of our minds, but, as it happens, only a consequence of an accidental lack of understanding which unwarrantably deceived us in believing in the plausibility of Maimonian skepticism. If *the very same* object might be thought of as determined by the rules of the understanding as well as it might be thought of as determined outside of thought, then it will be possible, after all, to arrive at a comprehensive account of thinking. For if so, it would make sense to maintain that '*finding* a meaningful world' comes to the very same thing as '*making* the world meaningful'. Or, in one more formulation, if the dogmatic option is tenable, then it will be possible after all that judgements provide both the *reason why* and the *fact that* they apply to the objects they are about.

In the third section of this chapter, after having clarified what exactly Maimon means by the notion of an *object determined outside of thought*, I shall pay close attention to this line of argument. There I will present Maimon's reasons for calling Kant as well as the Wolffians dogmatic. By arguing in addition that it makes sense to call Rosenberg a twentieth century advocate of dogmatism, I aim to stress the systematic power of Maimon's analysis of the aporetic character of the structure of our accounts of the relation between thoughts and objects.

In the final section of this chapter I will reconstruct an argument of Maimon against what he called Kant's "empirical dogmatism". This argument is meant to show that the dogmatic option does not enable us to escape from the *Antinomy of Thought*, since the only way to make sense of dogmatism implies itself a profound problem of intelligibility.

To anticipate the core of the matter I might observe that the argument concerns our inability to understand the meaning of an identity-relation holding between the notion of an *object determined outside of thought* and that of an *object determined by thought.*

2. The notion of an *object determined outside of thought*

In Chapter Four I stated that the notion of an *object determined outside of thought* was introduced by Maimon to save the *function* of the notion of a *thing in itself* in a critical account of real thought, *without* having to introduce the idea of a transcendent object — an object the mind, by definition, cannot cope with. An *object determined outside of thought* must, therefore, be a consciousness-inherent object; an intentional object as I proposed to call it. It is an object our minds can cope with, although, as was already suggested, only in a confused, muddled, incomplete way. *Objects determined outside of thought* are objects of intuition, and intuitions are states of mind we happen to be in, without having the faintest idea of what caused us to be so. According to Maimon, this means that even though intuitions imply determinate objects, they do not imply a rule of the understanding by means of which it would be possible to explain, or reconstruct, the synthesis that led to the specific determination of the object in question. In order to be able to understand how such an object might be possible at all, I shall first have to clarify Maimon's use of the notion of an object.

For Maimon the notion of an *object* has on the one hand a very specific connotation, but on the other hand a very large extension. Thus, on the one hand the notion of an object only makes sense if related to the notion of a judgement. Something can be an object only as far as there can be a judgement whose subject-term does refer to it. On the other hand, almost everything can be an object, in this sense, since it is so very easy to construct a judgement about almost anything. After all, the only condition for a judgement, to make it a judgement that refers to an object (at least, to a logical object), is that it is not self-contradictory, i.e. that the predicate is a *possible* predicate of the subject:

a *logical object* is everything of which something can be predicated, even if it is no more than that it is identical to itself, or that it cannot be and not be at the same time.[7]

This means that anything which might be said to have an identity, is an object; i.e. it is the Principle of Identity that governs the possibility of objects. A logical object has, according to Maimon, a very simple identity: it must, in an act of consciousness, be distinguished from the subject:

If one abstracts from the *inner features* of a *real object* (an object treated as such, and distinguished from other objects, by a subject because of its inner features), and has left over just the fact that it is distinguished from a subject by means of consciousness, and is related to it as an object at all, then what remains is the *concept* of a *logical object* at all.[8]

Real objects, however (and as we saw in Chapter Four, *objects determined outside of thought* are real objects) cannot in such a simple sense be dependent upon a conscious being. Somehow they must have an identity 'of their own'—they must be unique. But of course, for Maimon this cannot mean that they are *things in themselves*, as was clear too from the discussion in Chapter Four. No, their 'inner features' will have to be consciousness-inherent, if they are going to be anything at all. This is a complex thesis, which should not at once be classified as idealism, not because it isn't[9], but rather because such a classification is likely to misplace the tenor of the thesis. It is not meant to be an ontological thesis, even though it will have ontological consequences.

---

[7] "Ein logisches Objekt ist alles das, wovon etwas prädizirt werden kann, sollte es auch bloß seyn, das es mit sich selbst einerlei ist, oder daß es nicht zugleich seyn und nicht seyn kann.", Maimon, *Logik*, p. 172.

[8] "Wenn man von einem reellen (durch innere Merkmale sowohl vom Subjekt, als Objekt betrachtet, als von andern Objekten unterschiedenes) Objekt die innern Merkmale abstrahirt, und nur das zurückbehält, daß es überhaupt vom Subjekt durchs Bewußtseyn unterschieden, und darauf, als Objekt überhaupt, bezogen wird, so bleibt der Begriff eines logischen Objekts überhaupt übrig.", Maimon, *Logik*, p. 173.

[9] It is, however, quite difficult to determine what kind of idealism it is. Atlas tends to identify it with Kant's transcendental idealism (see his *From Critical to Speculative Idealism*, p. 57), whereas Bergman is more careful (see his *The Philosophy of Solomon Maimon*, p. 89). Kuntze speaks of "Maimonscher Idealismus" as a kind of compromise between Transcendental Idealism and Transcendental Realism (see his *Die Philosophie Salomon Maimons*, p. 73).

Maimon's point here simply is that 'identity' implies 'determinateness', which in turn takes place only in consciousness. Consciousness itself is impersonal, nothing but the mere possibility of determinateness[10]. It is, as it were, the *event* of consciousness, the occurrence of determinateness, which enables objects as well as subjects (they, too, have a consciousness-inherent status) to manifest themselves to one another. And it is the dynamic of this event which Maimon tries to understand.

Two important points must be made here. Firstly, we have to notice that 'independence' is not part of the connotation of the notion of a real object. A real object is not a substance, not something which exists on its own, independent of everything else. No. To be sure, every real object will be (will have to be) *unique*, but for Maimon uniqueness is a matter of *complete* determinateness.[11] In other words, a real object is, according to Maimon, an object that is completely determined, an object whose inner features specify in every detail its reality; i.e. its place vis-à-vis everything else.[12] What status these inner features have, will follow from the second point.

As I take it, this second point is that Maimon's stress on the consciousness-inherent status of everything is not meant to be ontological but *methodological*. The dependence of both object and subject on the happening of consciousness implies that, in order to understand objects or subjects, we have to understand the *event* of consciousness itself. In other words, although it is possible, at least apparently, to approach an object from an ontological angle, as it seems

---

[10] Maimon's influence on Fichte is particularly clear, here. See, for example, Maimon's *Wörterbuch*, p. 62: "As a consequence, the philosophical, i.e. the *conceived*, and not the *felt* I is the most general concept of the subject of consciousness at all. It is to be sure always thought as the precondition of every specific consciousness, but it cannot be known in itself by means of inner features."; "Folglich ist das philosophische, d.h. das *gedachte*, nicht aber *gefühlte* Ich, der allgemeinste Begriff vom Subjekt des Bewußtseyns überhaupt, das zwar als Bedingung eines jeden besondern Bewußtseyns *gedacht*, durch keine innere Merkmale aber an sich *erkannt* werden kann." See on Maimon's influence on Fichte Samuel Hugo Bergman, *The Philosophy of Solomon Maimon*, pp. 245-247.

[11] See, for instance, *Logik*, pp. 132-135, where Maimon argues, along Leibnizian lines, that two identical drops of water show that our concept of a drop of water is not completely determinate, since it does not allow us to distinguish between those two drops, although they must have different determinations.

[12] Cf. Chapter Four, above, p. 66, and pp. 84-88

possible to approach a subject from a psychological angle, this will not suffice, unless one wrongfully hypostatize objects or subjects as things in themselves. Without such hypostatization one will need to approach the event of consciousness itself from an angle I, in want of a better label, will dub *semantic*. By that I mean that in order to understand the event of consciousness, we have to study its intentionality —that is, if objects are *intentional* objects, and if subjects are *intentional* states of mind, then we have to understand their *meaning* and not their *being* (as if that is something beyond or behind their meaning). That is why Maimon relates objects and subjects in such a strong sense to *judgements*.

With respect to the inner features of real objects this methodological change in perspective has important consequences. These inner features will be presented by judgements, and so it becomes very important to understand the nature of judgements that refer to *objects determined outside of thought*. We have to ask at least two questions about them:

(1) What is a judgement if not the product of thought?
(2) How can a judgement determine its object completely?

The first question reflects the fact that a judgement, if it is supposed to refer to an *object determined outside of thought*, cannot consist in a synthesis of the understanding, a synthesis thought can produce because it possesses the rule that connects the 'determinable' and its determination (this rule being the concept of the object in question). After all, there are no concepts of *objects determined outside of thought*; they are the objects of intuitions. Thus, the question is whether an intuition can be, or (what is a more careful formulation) can be presented in a judgement, and if so, what kind of judgement. There are two problems here. On the one hand it seems to be the case that the elements of judgements are conceptual, since they are linguistic; and on the other hand it seems to be the case that the understanding is the only faculty able to generate judgements.

It will prove fruitful to take notice here of Richard Aquila's study of Kant's theory of knowledge[13]. Of course, this is a study of Kant and not of Maimon, but Aquila deals in a very thorough way with the relations between intuitions and judgements, such that his conclusions clarify much about the point Maimon tries to make here.[14] Taking first a semantical approach Aquila develops an account of intuition as *singular reference*.[15] The function of an intuition in a judgement seems to be the *actual* reference to the specific thing the judgement is about. As such they might be said to be the means by which things are 'given' to thought. Intuitions, as it were, occupy the place of the subject-term: they pick out the 'determinable', "that of which we can predicate something"[16]. However, and this is the case in Kant's work as well as in Maimon's, Aquila observes that the place of the subject-term is often occupied by a concept, which leads him to make a very important distinction between concepts that are 'informing' and concepts that function in judgements merely as external predications.

> In a judgment most adequately expressed as the judgment that "This is both a man and giving a lecture," both the concepts *man* and *giving a lecture* would appear to attach externally to the intuition in question. In a judgment most adequately represented as the judgment that "This *man* is giving a lecture" rather than "This is both a man and giving a lecture," on the other hand, the concept *giving a lecture* would attach externally while the concept *man* would actually inform the intuition in question.[17]

Refining his account, acknowledging the fact that for Kant[18] there is no real distinction between a linguistic and a mental account of thought, Aquila develops, besides, or on top of, his semantical approach a *phenomenological* approach, in which the function of an intuition as singular reference is specified as a mode of awareness.[19]

---

13 Richard Aquila, *Representational Mind*; particularly pp. 33-82.
14 I will not go into all the subtleties of Aquila's study, but just want to make use of his conclusions in order to clarify.
15 ibid. pp. 36ff.
16 "das, wovon etwas prädizirt werden kann". Quoted from Maimon, just above, see footnote 7.
17 ibid. pp. 47-48.
18 as well as for Maimon, as I already observed in Chapter Four.
19 ibid. pp. 49ff.

This has two consequences. On the one hand such an account allows for an understanding of singular reference irrespective of the ontological status of the thing referred to. This corresponds to my stress on that feature of Maimon's 'ontology' according to which all objects are *intentional* objects. On the other hand it allows for the very important function of space (and time) in intuition[20], Aquila's point being that the intentionality of consciousness implies that it makes sense to speak about a region of space as a particular intentional object.[21]

From this we can infer that not all elements of a judgement are conceptual, at least not all elements of a judgement that presents an intuition, since such a judgement will contain spatial *indexicals*[22]. No judgement that contains a singular reference can do without such indexicals as 'this' or 'that'; linguistic elements that cannot be concepts since they don't have any connotation — they merely stand for the referring function of the intuition present in the judgement.

A second inference is that it is not true that the understanding is the only faculty capable of generating judgements, at least not according to Maimon. We have to accept that there must be another faculty capable of generating judgements, since judgements that contain spatial indexicals typically do not combine a subject and a predicate by means of a rule of the understanding, but by means of their junction in a certain region of space. According to Maimon this faculty is the imagination.[23] There does not necessarily hinge much on this claim, since it will be possible, using Aquila's distinction between the semantical and the phenomenological approach, to keep the imagination responsible only for the judgement in which the intuition is presented, not for the junction of 'determinable' and determination in the same region of space—that is, not for the intuition itself. After all, as stated in Chapter Four, it is characteristic of intuitions, according to Maimon, that we happen to have them, without knowing anything about their causes, which implies that we cannot assume that the imagination causes the

---

[20] A function Kant did not understand correctly, according to Maimon. I will say more about that in a moment.

[21] Aquila, ibid. pp. 78-82.

[22] Such judgements will also imply temporal indexicals, and a 'subject'-indexical (the elusive 'I').

[23] See, for example, Maimon, *Wörterbuch*, pp. 38-39.

awareness of a certain qualified region of space.[24] Thus we can safeguard the distinction between arbitrary judgements that might be the fanciful offspring of an exuberant imagination, and judgements that, although being arbitrary as far as the understanding is concerned, do nevertheless imply some objective reality; the reality of an *object determined outside of thought* —i.e. a certain qualified region of space.[25]

We are now in a position to give a first specification of the inner features of an *object determined outside of thought*. These inner features are features of judgements that are (1) presumably generated by the imagination, and (2) characterized by spatial (and temporal) indexicals. Stated thus, it seems to be the case that *objects determined outside of thought* have two completely different kinds of inner features. On the one hand, such an object is determinate in virtue of the qualities associated with the concepts used in the judgement which gives expression to the having of an intuition of it. Having, for example, an intuition of a man giving a lecture, which comes, according to Maimon, to the same thing as forming, for example, the judgement "This man is giving a lecture", 'man' and 'giving a lecture' seem to be the inner features of the *object determined outside of thought* in question. On the other hand, Maimon asserts as well that this object is determinate in virtue of its spatio-temporal unity of which one is aware — a unity expressed by means of the indexical "This". This latter feature, however, cannot in any sense be *understood* to be an inner feature of the *object determined outside of thought*. After all, this feature only makes sense within the actual event of consciousness itself. This does not imply that the determinateness of the object in virtue of its spatio-temporal unity is not objective, but only that it is not possible for us to *understand* what this is supposed to mean. And as I argued in Chapter Four, that is exactly the point of Maimon's notion of an *object determined outside of thought*.

Let me clarify this point by providing the answer to the second question formulated above: How can a judgement determine its object completely? As we saw, *objects determined outside of thought* must be

---

[24] Thus the imagination is responsible for the meaning we attach to the intuition, not for the having of the intuition itself. See Maimon, *Wörterbuch*, pp. 38-39.
[25] Cf. Maimon, *Logik*, pp. 118-120.

completely determined, since they are real objects, having an objective reality, a unique identity. Now for sure, this means that the qualities associated with the concepts used in the judgement, cannot be the only features of *objects determined outside of thought*. After all, no series of concepts, however extended, will succeed to determine whatever object *completely*. That is, no finite series; hence, no judgement generated by our finite mind can determine an object completely if it will merely consist of concepts.[26] Therefore, we have to realize that it is precisely the indexical (i.e. the expression of our awareness of a certain region of space) that makes a judgement into a judgement that determines its object completely, although in a way we do not understand.[27] This means that we do not *understand* the *object determined outside of thought*, because the feature that is crucial for its unique identity

---

[26] We have seen this in the previous chapter, where I discussed Maimon's ideas about the distinction between the finite and the infinite mind among others in terms of our inability to understand more than a tiny fragment of the concept of a real object. See above, pp. 129ff.

[27] This is a constant theme in Maimon's writings. In the important passage on space and time in the *Logik* we can read an interesting formulation of it, in a Leibnizian vein: "Even though, for instance, two drops of water are *identical* according to their *concepts* (at least as far as we can understand), it is still certain that they can exist as *different objects*, indeed on the condition that they are in different times or different places. Nevertheless, it remains *inexplicable* why they should be in these distinct *external relationships*, because they are (with respect to their *inner features*) determined by the same *concept*. Therefore we have to assume that this common *concept* is incomplete, i.e. that it does not contain everything by which these *objects* are determined, because it does contain the *common part* of both, but not the *particular part* of each, by means of which its *external relationship* is determined. That is why we are led to look for the *particular* of these *objects*, and to make our *concept* of them constantly more complete. *Space* and *time* are as it were indications to try to make our empirical knowledge more complete.", "Daß z.B. zwei Tropfen Wasser ihrem *Begriffe* nach (wie weit wir denselben erhalten können) *einerlei* und dennoch als *verschiedene Objekte* existiren können, ist zwar unter der Bedingung, daß sie zu verschiedenen Zeiten oder in verschiedenen Orten sind, gewiß, es bleibt aber dennoch *unerklärbar*, warum sie, da sie (in Ansehung ihrer *innern Merkmale*) durch einerlei *Begriff* bestimmt werden, dennoch in verschiedenen *äußeren Verhältnissen* seyn sollten? Wir müssen also annehmen, daß dieser gemeinschaftliche *Begriff* unvolständig ist, d.h. daß er nicht alles enthält, wodurch die *Objekte* bestimmt werden, indem er bloß das beiden *Gemeinschaftliche*, nicht aber das einem jeden *Eigene*, wodurch sein besonderes *äußeres Verhältniß* bestimmt wird, enthält. Dadurch werden wir geleitet, dieses *Eigene* in den *Objekten* aufzusuchen, und unsere *Begriffe* von denselben immer volständiger zu machen. *Raum* und *Zeit* können also als Anweisungen zur Vollständigmachung unserer empyrischen Erkenntniß betrachtet werden." *Logik*, p. 135.

remains a mystery that happens to us; it is, as it were, an event we cannot reconstruct.

I am now in a position to give a definition of Maimon's notion of an *object determined outside of thought*. This is an object of an intuition, which is itself an awareness of a certain qualified region of space. For Maimon this intuition, being a conscious event, is manifest as or in a judgement. The latter is, according to Maimon, a product of the imagination such that it presents a synthesis of the qualities involved by means of an indexical that refers to the region of space as a spatio-temporal unity. These qualities function as the inner features of the object involved, while the indexical, though in an incomprehensible way, gives the object its uniqueness; i.e. the latter is a feature of the object which is unknown, but nonetheless self-evident. Thus, we can discern three aspects that do matter with respect to an *object determined outside of thought*: (1) the intuition as a mental state, as the event of consciousness — the actual occurrence of a judgement; (2) the synthesis of the qualities involved as the inner features of an object; and (3) the reference to a region of space as an objective reality. Maimon distinguished these aspects as follows:

> Intuitions contain something *material* (related to sensation) which is only a representation of the *state of the subject* that is caused by it, and something *formal* which is only a representation of the *object* to which these intuitions are related. The *forms of intuition* are, as already shown, *time* and *space*, which constitute the *objective* in intuition.[28]

Now that I have clarified the notion of an *object determined outside of thought*, it will be possible to formulate the thesis of dogmatism. This will be done in a number of ways in the next section.

---

[28] "Anschauungen enthalten etwas *Materielles*, (sich auf Empfindung beziehendes), wodurch bloß der durch sie verursachte *Zustand des Subjekts*, und etwas *Formelles*, wodurch das respektive *Objekt*, worauf sie sich beziehen, vorgestellt wird. Die *Formen der Anschauungen* aber sind, wie schon gezeigt worden, *Zeit* und *Raum*, welche das *Objektive* in den *Anschauungen* ausmachen." *Logik*, p. 185. In order to see in what way Maimon takes his 'idealism' methodologically serious, it might suffice here to notice that the first two aspects are only represented ("vorgestellt") in intuitions. Neither mental states nor objects are hypostatized.

3. The thesis of dogmatism

In the first section of this chapter I introduced the thesis of dogmatism as a thesis about the *commensurability* of thought and reality. As such it was supposed to be an identity-thesis, stating that the determinations that make up an *object determined outside of thought* will in the final analysis turn out to be the very same determinations as those thought uses to determine *objects determined by thought.* This can be seen easily in the case of the Wolffians who argued for a theory of logic, according to which "there is no problem in our thought corresponding to reality. Since both thought and reality have to conform to the laws of logic, we can rest assured that thought conforms to reality (and conversily); for both concept and object share a common logical structure."[29] Or, as Maimon characterized it:

> Dogmatism believes to possess knowledge of things in themselves, i.e. it believes to be able to determine by means of a priori *relations* things that are just thought of in an undetermined way as being determined in itself outside of the faculties of cognition. (...) Thus, dogmatism determines *things in themselves* (things we can, as such, only think but not know) only by means of *possible relations*, as things that really do stand in these *relations*.[30]

Apparently, Kant's position is absolutely the reverse, but just here we can see the strength of the Maimonian notion of an *object determined outside of thought.* The point is that the thesis of the Wolffians is *not* dogmatic because it claims the possibility of knowledge of transcendent objects (i.e. things in themselves), but because it claims the intelligibility of *objects determined outside of thought.* As it happens to be, the Wolffians think that such objects *are* things in themselves, but,

---

[29] Beiser, op.cit. p. 201

[30] "Der *Dogmatismus* glaubt im Besitze von Erkenntnissen der *Dinge an sich* zu seyn, d.h. bloß auf eine unbestimmte Art als an sich außer dem Erkenntnißvermögen bestimmt gedachte (logische) *Dinge* dennoch durch a priori gedachte *Verhältnisse* bestimmen zu können. (...) Der *Dogmatismus* bestimmt also an sich bloß *gedachte* aber von uns *unerkannte Dinge an sich*, durch die ihnen blos *möglichen Verhältnisse*, als Dinge, die wirklich in diesem *Verhältnisse* stehen." Maimon, *Logik*, pp. 374-375

as I clarified in the previous section, this is not the case. *objects determined outside of thought* are consciousness-inherent. They are objects of intuition, related to judgements that contain spatio-temporal indexicals. Therefore it is possible for Maimon to argue that the Kantian appearances, considered to be empirical objects, are *objects determined outside of thought*, and consequently, that it is possible to argue, as Maimon does, that Kant defends the dogmatic thesis too. After all, Kant holds that, even though appearances are given a posteriori, they conform to thought. Their form necessarily corresponds to the forms of thought. Or, as Maimon characterizes the position of the "empirical dogmatists":

> They assert that the objects of knowledge are given to us a posteriori, but that their forms are in us a priori. (...) In addition they assert that we have the capacity to *conceive* these forms not only in themselves as objects, but also to *know* them in objects. This *knowledge*, however, is not realised by means of an immediate perception, but by means of a perception of a scheme or feature of these objects, in such a way that we, by judging that these forms belong to these objects, become as well conscious of these forms themselves. (...) If one were to ask the Kantians whether we really are able to judge that certain forms belong to sensible objects, they would answer: certainly. Were one to ask, next, how we know that, they would answer: because of a feature a priori, which is necessarily related to a posteriori objects.[31]

In order to be able to grasp the dogmatic point in this Kantian position, it will be necessary to understand that it is possible, from a Maimonian perspective, to argue that Kant treats appearances sometimes as if they are *objects determined outside of thought*, and sometimes as if they are *objects determined by thought*. On the one hand

---

[31] Diese behaupten: daß die Objekte unsrer Erkenntniß uns a posteriori gegeben, aber die Formen derselben in uns a priori sind. (...) Ferner behaupten sie daß wir das Vermögen haben, nicht bloß diese Formen an sich, als Objekte zu *denken*, sondern auch als Formen in den Objekten zu *erkennen*. Dieses Erkennen geschiehet aber nicht durch eine unmittelbare Wahrnehmung, sondern vermittelst der Wahrnehmung eines Schema's oder Merkmals an den Objekten, so das wir durch das Urtheil: daß diese Formen den Objekten zukommen, zugleich zum Bewußtseyn dieser Formen selbst gelangen. (...) Fragt man die Kantianer: ob wir in der That urtheilen, daß gewisse Formen gewissen sinnlichen Objekten zukommen? so antworten sie: Allerdings. Fragt man sie ferner: woran erkennen wir dieses? so antworten sie: An einem Merkmal a priori, daß sich nothwendig auf Objekte a posteriori beziehet.", Maimon, *Transscendentalphilosophie*, pp. 434-437.

Kant claims that appearances are 'given'; they are empirical objects exhibiting an objective reality in outer space. As such they are, according to Maimon, *objects determined outside of thought*—spatio-temporal unities we happen to be aware of. On the other hand, however, Kant maintains that appearances could only be what they are insofar as they conform to our faculty of cognition, i.e. insofar as they are determined by means of the categories.[32] As such they are, according to Maimon, considered to be *objects determined by thought.*

This is a significant ambiguity, but the obvious Kantian reply is to point out the difference between an empirical and a transcendental perspective. It is only justified from an empirical point of view (i.e. from the point of view of a conscious being trying to understand the world she lives in) to regard appearances as if they are *objects determined outside of thought.* Likewise it is only justified from a transcendental point of view (i.e. from the point of view of a philosopher trying to understand the conditions of knowledge) to regard appearances as if they are *objects determined by thought.* It is only from an empirical point of view possible to have the impression that appearances are objects that stand over against us, as if they have an identity of their own in virtue of their inner features. From the transcendental point of view, however, we can understand that our faculty of cognition has imposed on those objects an intelligible form, which is what their inner features display.

Even granted that it is possible to account for the ambiguity of the notion of an appearance by means of such a distinction between an empirical and a transcendental point of view, this does not rebut the charge of dogmatism. Quite the contrary. If it would be possible for Kant to argue convincingly that appearances might rightly be treated, under different perspectives, as both *objects determined outside of thought* and *objects determined by thought*, then this would be, accor-

---

[32] Both Kant and Maimon understand a phrase like "being determined according to rules of the understanding" as referring to the categories. Nevertheless, Maimon's account of an *object determined by thought* is stronger than Kant's, since Maimon claims that the categories are not basic. They are derived from the *Principle of Determinability*, which means that, as we have seen in the previous chapter, an *object determined by thought* is an object referred to by means of a judgement that is governed by the *Principle of Determinability*. See Maimon, *Logik*, pp. 156ff.

ding to Maimon, an important argument *in favour of* dogmatism. After all, the point of dogmatism is just to assert that thought and reality are commensurable, which means for Maimon nothing but to assert that the determinations that make up the identity of an object considered to be an *object determined outside of thought* are the very same determinations used by thought to determine the identity of this very same object as an *object determined by thought*. But, as I will argue below, there is no such argument in favour of dogmatism.[33]

In terms of the *Antinomy of Thought*, this Kantian kind of "empirical dogmatism" amounts directly to a dissolution of the first formulation (and, by consequence, of the other formulations too). That is, according to Maimon Kant assumes he is able to make sense of both the requirement that real thought has to determine its objects on its own and the requirement that it should receive them as being determined outside of thought. Once we understand the distinction between the empirical and the transcendental point of view, Kant assumes, according to Maimon, that we will understand that Transcendental Idealism makes sense of the Thesis (Real thought will only be real thought if it determines its object according to rules of the understanding) and empirical realism of the Antithesis (Real thought will only be real thought if its object is given to thought as determined outside of thought). In the same vein this "empirical dogmatism" is supposed to lead to the elimination of the aporetic character of the structure of our accounts of thinking. That is, from the transcendental point of view we are justified to hold that the relation between thoughts and objects might be characterized by means of the slogan '*making* the world meaningful', whereas from the empirical point of view, we will be justified to hold that this very same relation might be characterized by means of the slogan '*finding* a meaningful world'.

In order to stress the systematic point of Maimon's claim that Kant argues for the dogmatic option, and to show by that Maimon's rele-

---

[33] It is indeed one of the connotations of 'dogmatism' that there never is an argument in favour of it. The only reason for dogmatism always seems to be that, confronted with a dilemma like 'either dogmatism or accepting the *Antinomy of Thought*' one does not want to take the risk of accepting the *Antinomy*.

vance to contemporary philosophy, I would like to point out a parallel between the dogmatic thesis formulated above, and *Rosenberg's* interpretation of Kant's Copernican revolution as discussed in Chapter One. There it was stated that Rosenberg accepts identity-relations holding between (1) justified representations, (2) correct representations, and (3) representations that are adequate to the world. Being representations we might regard them as identifying intentional objects[34], and it seems quite acceptable that the first kind of representation identifies an *object determined by thought*[35], whereas the last kind of representation might be said to identify an *object determined outside of thought*. After all, the first kind of representation is the result of the activity of "an apperceptive, temporally-discursive intelligence engaged in what is necessarily the fundamental project of any such being, the building up through time of a comprehensive, coherent, unitary and determinate world-picture"[36]. The last kind of representation, even though Rosenberg argues forcefully that these representations are *essentially* nothing but *correct* (i.e. *justified*) representations, has the strong connotation of being about an *object determined outside of thought* (to be sure, in the Maimonian sense of an immanent object of consciousness), as might be grasped from Rosenberg's assertion that it "is surely a necessary truth that an object is represented correctly *if and only if* it is (in itself) as it is represented as being"[37], and from his remark that we sometimes "*find ourselves* with experiences which cannot be afforded a determinate explanatory accomodation in the evolving world-picture".[38]

The identity-relation that according to Rosenberg exists between these kinds of representations, certainly looks a lot like the identity-relation the dogmatic thesis is about. This should not really surprise us, as

---

[34] In the quite unproblematic sense in which John Searle states this as well. See his *Intentionality. An essay in the philosophy of mind*, pp. 4-19.

[35] Though in a loose sense, i.e. satisfying the condition that the object be determined according to 'rules of the understanding', but without a strict interpretation of what such a rule (or concept) amounts to (thus allowing Rosenberg to opt for a Wittgensteinian account of concepts).

[36] Rosenberg, *One World and Our Knowledge of It*, p. 127. See above, p. 15.

[37] ibid. p. 110. See above, p. 10

[38] ibid. p. 177. See above, p. 14

it is clear that Rosenberg tries to defend a kind of Kantian philosophy, and, notably, *that* kind of Kantianism ("constitutive realism") that Maimon identified as "empirical dogmatism".[39] What I want to suggest, then, is that Rosenberg is in this respect a contemporary adherent of dogmatism.

This interpretation is strongly supported by what Rosenberg says in his daring "Retrospect" to *One World and Our Knowledge of It* [40]. Arguing that we should abandon what he calls "the Myth of Mind Apart" (whose "central element is the supposition that the world is a thing which is ontologically alien to us as we are, to us as representers and as knowers—a thing which stands somehow outside us, and which challenges us to bring the inner life of our thinking into harmony with it"[41]), he writes:

> the ideal order *is* the real, not in the false sense that "the world is Idea", but in the sense that our representings *of* the world are at the same time doings *in* the world. The world is not a thing apart from us as we are, but we are both *in* the world and *of* it — and our thinkings are episodes of its own determinate diachronic unfolding. As representers and as knowers, we are within the world as *evolved organisms*. And whatever principles govern the inner life of our thinkings are *necessarily* the principles according to which the world as a whole evolves simply because our inner life is an integral part and aspect of that determinate evolution. What follows from this, of course, is that there can be no *question* of a harmony between the conceptual and the real as something *to be achieved*.[42]

It is very significant that Rosenberg assumes here, in a very straight way, the central idea of Wolffian dogmatism; i.e. the idea of the laws of logic governing both thought and reality. Of course there is another

---

[39] Both Rosenberg and Maimon discern two parts in Kant's critical philosophy. (See Rosenberg, *One World and Our Knowledge of It*, pp. 109ff. and Maimon, *Transscendentalphilosophie*, pp. 434-437). It is defensible that the part that Rosenberg labels Empirical Realism is the same as what Maimon labeled "empirical dogmatism", even though it is not straightforwardly defensible that Transcendental Idealism, which is in Rosenberg's interpretation the other part, is the same as what Maimon labeled "rational skepticism". I discussed the difference between the connotations of 'idealism' versus 'skepticism' in the chapter on Nagel. See above, pp. 35ff.

[40] *One World and Our Knowledge of It*, pp. 188-191.

[41] ibid. p. 189.

[42] ibid. p. 190.

flavour: behind the slight agnosticism lurks the spirit of a "darwinian evolutionary epistemology". But the dogmatism is just the same: our representings of the world (i.e. *objects determined by thought*) *are* at the same time episodes of the world's unfolding (i.e. *objects determined outside of thought*).

With this rather bold dogmatism comes a quite straightforward solution for the *Antinomy of Thought*. The *Antinomy*, just as most of the "great and classical puzzles" that make up the history of philosophy[43], is an unhappy result of our tendency to believe in the Myth of Mind Apart. Once we understand the truth of the dogmatic thesis, once we understand that the ideal order *is* the real, we will understand that it is indeed possible to identify any *object determined outside of thought* with a specific *object determined by thought* —i.e. that indeed the *Antinomy of Thought* arises only once we assume that the *objects determined outside of thought* are things in themselves. Thus the arguments Rosenberg advances in favour of his dogmatism resemble those of Kant and not those of the Wolffians.

4. Maimon against "empirical dogmatism"

The point of Maimon's arguments against "empirical dogmatism", to which I shall turn now, is precisely that it is not possible for us to *understand* the truth of the dogmatic thesis. It is important to pay attention to the status of this claim. Firstly, it is not, in a pre-Kantian sense, an ontological claim. Maimon does not argue that there are *objects determined outside of thought* and *objects determined by thought*, and that, as a matter of fact, these objects are not identical to one another. This is exactly the level at which Maimon refuses to reason. He does

[43] It is hardly possible not to suspect Rosenberg of adopting a hilariously ironical attitude, as he argues that we can rid ourselves, by means of abandoning the Myth of Mind Apart, of The Challenge of Skepticism or The Problem of Our Knowledge of the External World, and of The Problem of Induction or The Problem of the Reality of Theoretical Entities, and of The Problem of the Impossible Choice between Realism and Idealism or The Problem of the Impossible Choicebetween Rationalism and Empiricism, and of The Problem of Other Minds and even of The Question of the Relation of Fact and Value. ibid. p. 191.

not accept the Wolffian kind of suggestion that the shade of plausibility of the dogmatic thesis stems from the fact that both notions are supposed to *refer* to the same objects. For Maimon, as we have seen before, all talk of objects is talk about *intentional objects*.

Secondly, Maimon does not challenge dogmatism as if it was, in a Kantian sense, a strictly epistemological claim. That is, Maimon does not argue that there is knowledge of *objects determined outside of thought* and knowledge of *objects determined by thought*, and that, as a matter of fact, these different kinds of knowledge cannot be reduced to one another (either via the world — appearances and things in themselves are different aspects of the same reality —, or via the mind — what is real from an empirical point of view is ideal from a transcendental point of view). No, Maimon does not accept the Kantian kind of suggestion that the plausibility of the dogmatic thesis stems from the fact that we can, with respect to one and the same kind of objects, distinguish between two points of view. For Maimon, all talk of the relation between thoughts and objects is transcendental. And it is from within this transcendental point of view that we have to accept a distinction of meaning between the notion of an *object determined outside of thought* and that of an *object determined by thought*, between *intuitions* and *concepts*, between answering the *Quid facti* and answering the *Quid juris* — between, I might add, '*finding* a meaningful world' and '*making* the world meaningful'.

As I said before, according to Maimon, dogmatism is a thesis about the *commensurability* of thought and reality. Consequently, Maimon's reasoning against "empirical dogmatism" concerns the *intelligibility* of the notions we have to use in our accounts of thinking. His arguments against the dogmatic option, therefore, dwell upon our inability to *understand* the *meaning* of a relation of identity between *objects determined outside of thought* and *objects determined by thought*: if these two notions are going to mean anything at all, we have to accept that they cannot have the same meaning. In other words, the level at which Maimon challenges the dogmatic option, is the level of our *accounts* of the relation between thoughts and objects. The point is that if dogmatism is going to fail this does not mean that we proved something about reality, nor about the relation between thought and reality, but

only about our inabilities to arrive at a comprehensive account of thinking.

To organize Maimon's reasoning against "empirical dogmatism", and to show that it concerns the intelligibility of the identity-thesis in question, I propose to take a close look at the dilemma which is, according to Maimon, the result of a consistent critical philosophy unable to make sense of the *Faktum* upon which Kant's Transcendental Deduction is based. This *Faktum*, that we do apply the categories to the objects of experience, gives expression to Kant's "empirical dogmatism". It amounts to nothing, as will become evident, but the claim that we might assume that there is an identity-relation between *objects determined by thought* and *objects determined outside of thought*. The dilemma appears at different places in Maimon's works, for example in one of the final sections of the *Logik* :

> Therefore, my skepticism is founded upon this two-horned dilemma. Either the *fact that* (Faktum) is in itself false, and the adduced examples rest on an *illusion of the imagination*, as I showed already several times. In that case the *categories* do not have any *use* at all. Or the *fact that* is in itself true, but in that case its *reason why* is not *knowable*, and the categories (after their laborious *decuction* and *schematism*) remain but forms that cannot determine *objects*.[44]

The horns of this dilemma concern the two ways in which we might, according to Maimon, understand the possibility of an identity-relation between an *object determined outside of thought* and an *object determined by thought*. I will first discuss both alternatives separately, and subsequently, I will say something about the dilemma as such.

On the one hand, Maimon states that it might be the case that there only *seems* to be an identity-relation, but that actually there is none. Thus, it might be the case that the empirical objects we happen to be aware of, *seem* to display an intelligible (categorial) order. For Maimon

---

[44] "Mein *Skeptizismus* gründet sich also auf diese zweihörnichte Dilemma. Entweder ist das *Faktum* an sich (...) falsch, und die angeführten Beispiele beruhen auf *Täuschung der Einbildungskraft*, wie ich schon mehreremal gezeigt habe, die *Kathegorien* haben alsdann gar keinen *Gebrauch*; oder es ist an sich wahr, und dann hat es keinen *erkennbaren Grund*, und die *Kathegorien* bleiben nach ihrer mühsamen *Deduktion* und *Schematismus*, wie vor, bloße Formen die keine *Objekte* bestimmen können.", Maimon, *Logik*, p. 192. See also *Logik*, pp. 437-438, *Wörterbuch*, pp. 46-49.

this means that there might be judgements about objects of intuition that *seem* to be synthetic a priori.[45] The story behind this horn of the dilemma is Humean in essence. It seems to be the case, as goes one of Maimon's examples, that fire causes the stone to become warm, but it might well be that the causal order in question is merely apparent, that it is an illusion produced by our imagination, which unjustifiedly assumes that a contingent conjunction between perceived events reveals the actual operation of a principle.[46]

The point here is not to prove that the intelligible order of, for example, causality is merely an illusory effect of our imagination. For the sake of argument Maimon just assumes this, in order to argue that, even if we suppose that experience is actually not intelligible, it is still possible to explain why we perceive an apparent order. In terms of his critique of the dogmatic identity-thesis the point can be put as follows. Suppose, in order to introduce the first horn of the dilemma, there is *no* identity between *objects determined outside of thought* and *objects determined by thought*. The former notion refers to objects of intuition, in the way I explained in the previous section. The latter notion refers to the objects identified by means of judgements that are governed by the *Principle of Determinability*, in the way I explained in the previous chapter. Consequently, both notions cannot have the same meaning. This would be so because it is the case that, with respect to the identity of *objects determined outside of thought*, spatio-temporal indexicals are necessary to express the awareness of a certain qualified region of space in which the synthesis of the qualities involved is present. With respect to the identity of *objects determined by thought*, however, it is out of the question that anything but real relations of determinability, let alone indexicals, could have a function. Nevertheless, it could still *seem* to be the case that *objects determined outside of thought* are identical to *objects determined by thought*. This could be so because our imagination fools us in two ways by inciting generalizations. In the first place, by generalizing, we are likely to leave the indexicals out of the picture. Fire warms *stones*, not this and this and this and (...) this stone. Se-

---

[45] As, for example, the one I discussed in the previous chapter: 'Grass' and 'green' stand in relation of 'substance' and 'attribute' to one another. See above, p. 110-111.
[46] Cf. Maimon, *Logik*, p. 191.

condly, by generalizing, our imagination generates habits: we get the impression that the conjunction in question has a kind of immediate naturalness. As if the qualities involved (the determination and the 'determinable' of the judgement in question) belong to one another *prior* to any other combination. And this means nothing but the genesis of the impression that the judgement in question has an a priori character.[47]

The upshot of this attempted explanation of the apparent order we experience by means of the operations of the imagination, is that Kant's attempt to use this order in his Transcendental Deduction to prove the 'transcendental fact' that *objects determined by thought* are identical to *objects determined outside of thought* fails. It fails, and this is crucial, in the sense that the supposed identity is *not the only way to understand* the apparent fact that we *do* apply the categories to the objects of experience. Thus, even though Maimon's critique of Kant's Transcendental Deduction aims to show that the deduction is a *petitio principii*[48], it is as well a critique in which it is assumed that the deduction is a *regressive argument.*[49] That is, even though Maimon is unwilling to accept the *Faktum*, and argues that once we assume it, the deduction is a piece of cake, he is nevertheless aware of the fact that the point of the Transcendental Deduction is to provide the *meaning* of the *Faktum*, and not to answer the skeptical challenge. What Maimon is unwilling to accept, in other words, is that the *Faktum* makes sense as a 'transcendental fact'. We don't know yet what it *means* to assert that the objects of experience display an intelligible order. And Kant's Transcendental Deduction, which aims to provide the meaning of it in terms of an identity between *objects determined outside of thought* (appearances conceived from the empirical point of view) and *objects determined by thought* (appearances conceived from the transcendental point of view) fails *as a transcendental argument.* It fails because the argument does not provide the necessary conditions for there being

---

[47] Cf. my discussion of the connotation of a priori in section 2 of Chapter Four above, pp. 69f.

[48] Cf. Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, p. 288.

[49] Cf. Karl Ameriks, "Kant's Transcendental Deduction as a Regressive Argument", in *Kantstudien*, 1978.

such a 'transcendental fact', even though it might provide sufficient conditions.[50] For even though it might be the case that the identity-thesis makes sense of the *Faktum*, so does the Humean explanation in terms of the operations of our imagination, without implying the dogmatic identity-thesis.

The second horn of the dilemma starts from the assumption that the dogmatic identity-thesis obtains, and seeks to determine whether *we* could have a reason to defend the dogmatic option. Again the point of Maimon's criticism is on the level of the intelligibility of our accounts of the relation between thoughts and objects. He is not interested in whether or not it is the case that *objects determined outside of thought* are indeed identical to *objects determined by thought*, but merely in whether or not *we* will be able to *understand* what such an identity-thesis means. Therefore, we had better formulate the dogmatic claim as follows: the determinations that we use in judgements that identify *objects determined outside of thought* will turn out to be the very same determinations that we use in judgements that identify *objects determined by thought*. Formulated in this way, the point of the second horn of the dilemma emerges in a quite straightforward way. It is true that judgements that identify *objects determined outside of thought* contain notions that introduce a 'determinable' and a determination. But these notions do not function as identifying the objects they are supposed to refer to. As I explained in the previous section, the identification of *objects determined outside of thought* is a matter of intuition, or, on the level of judgements, a matter of spatio-temporal indexicals. Therefore, we have no reason to believe that these notions apply to the objects they are supposed to refer to. And what is more, and this is the crucial point, the notions that introduce the 'determinable' and the determination will on principle *never* imply a real relation of determinability, whereas the determinations that identify *objects determined by thought* will on principle *always* imply a real relation of determinability.[51] As a conse-

---

[50] The argument resembles those put forward by Karl Ameriks, op.cit. p. 274 and Stephan Körner, "The Impossibility of Transcendental Deductions" in *Kant Studies Today*, ed. L.W. Beck, 1969. See also Nagel's argument against Kant that I discussed in Chapter Three, above pp. 35-38.

[51] We have seen this point in Chapter Four where I discussed the distinction between real objects of intuition and possible objects of concepts. See above, pp. 85-90.

quence, we might conclude that we do not know what we mean if we ascertain that *objects determined by thought* are identical to *objects determined outside of thought.* This does not mean that the dogmatic thesis is false, nor that it is true; it is *meaningless*, which does not, however, imply that we have won, by means of this argument, a positive account of the relation between thoughts and objects, other than an account which implies the *Antinomy of Thought.*

Maimon does not always present his arguments against Kant's "empirical dogmatism" in the way of a dilemma. At times he presents both sides of the dilemma in a sequential way, as if the second objection comes on top of the first. This is, for example, the case on the last page of the *Briefe des Philaletes an Aenesidemus*:

> Thus, I have two reasons to doubt the use of the categories with respect to experience. Firstly, there is the Humean, subjective explanation of this presumed use, that I already introduced. And in addition there is the absence of the required reason for such a use, namely the insight in the relation of determinability (...) with respect to empirical objects.[52]

Nevertheless, if we take the objections as the horns of a dilemma, there is the advantage that we are in a position to see (1) that the arguments are directed against the dogmatic thesis, and (2) that they concern the *meaning* of the identity-thesis. This can be shown by taking notice of the striking similarity between Maimon's arguments against Kant's Transcendental Deduction and the conclusion of his "Herausforderung an die Dogmatiker oder AntiKantianer":

> *Conclusio*: Well, what right do you have, to treat the objects of metaphysics as real objects, to assign necessarily certain forms (substance, singularity, and so

---

[52] "Ich bezweifle also den Erfahrungsgebrauch der Kathegorien aus einem doppelten Grund, erstlich aus der schon angeführten humischen subjektiven Erklärungsart dieses vermeintlichen Gebrauchs; und dann wieder aus dem Mangel des zu diesem Gebrauche erforderlichen Grundes, nämlich der Einsicht in das Verhältniß der Bestimmbarkeit (...) an den empyrischen Objekten.", Maimon, *Logik*, pp. 437-438. Beiser presents Maimon's objections against Kant's Transcendental Deduction along this line, separating it from the argument in terms of the radical dualism between sensibility and understanding that supports the *Antinomy of Thought.* See Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, pp. 288-292.

on) to them, and to determine them in such a way? You should either generate these objects out of these forms themselves, which is impossible, because forms cannot become objects, or you should assign these forms to completely unknown objects, which is, however, illegal.[53]

It is no accident that this conclusion is put in the form of a dilemma, or, so I argue. After all, as we have seen, it is according to Maimon up to a dogmatic philosopher to defend an identity-thesis between *objects determined by thought* and *objects determined outside of thought*. For a Wolffian dogmatic this means that he has to argue that transcendent objects (i.e. the Wolffian kind of what are according to Maimon *objects determined outside of thought*) are identical to *objects determined by thought*. Taking into account that Maimon is arguing against the *intelligibility* of the dogmatic thesis, the either/or form makes sense. This is so because, with respect to the intelligibility of the thesis, it is irrelevant whether the thesis is actually true or whether it is false. If it is false, we have to make sense of the apparent plausibility of the dogmatic arguments, and if it is true, we have to make sense of whether or not we are able to know it is true.

In the first case, the Wolffian version of the identity-thesis is obviously supposed to be false. Maimon's referring to the genesis of the transcendent objects out of the forms of thought has both, I argue, to do with the fact that an *object determined by thought* is supposed to be an object produced by thought according to a rule of the understanding, and with the fact that Maimon tries to make sense of the apparent plausibility of the dogmatic arguments. The fact is that Maimon is referring here to the Kantian kind of explanation of this seeming plausibility (as developed in the Transcendental Dialectic) in terms of the tendency to take regulative ideas as truly referring. This kind of explanation, which rebuts the position of a Wolffian kind of metaphysical dogmatism, is according to Maimon actually the same as the Humean

---

[53] "*Conclusio*: Was für ein Recht haben sie also, die Gegenstände der Metaphysik als reelle Objekte zu behandeln, ihnen gewisse Formen (Substanzialität, Einfachheit, u.dgl.) auf eine nothwendige Art beizulegen, und sie dadurch zu bestimmen? Sie müssen also entweder diese Objekte aus den Formen selbst entstehen lassen, welches aber unmöglich ist, weil Formen nie Objekte werden können; oder Sie müssen diese Formen ganz unbekannten Objekte beilegen, welches wiederum unrechtmäßig ist.", Maimon, *Wörterbuch*, p. 46.

kind of explanation in terms of the operations of our imagination, which rebuts the position, as we saw above, of a Kantian kind of "empirical dogmatism". This is so because the regulative ideas of pure reason are, Maimon argues, nothing but illusory products of the imagination, just as the apparently principled order of experience.[54] Thus, it is possible to hold that Maimon uses Kant's interpretation of the apparent plausibility of Wolfian dogmatism to point out that Kant's "empirical dogmatism" is also only apparently plausible. Granted that the identity-thesis is false, the conclusion is that the dogmatic arguments are not good enough to convince us of it being true.

But in addition, supposing that the dogmatic identity-thesis is true, both kinds of dogmatic philosophers are actually not in a position to give us a compelling reason for knowing it is true. It might as well be false, which just means to come to the conclusion I formulated above. Whether or not the dogmatic identity-thesis is true, we are not in a position to *understand* what it could *mean* to hold that it is true.

This is all, in a sense, nothing but to repeat the claims of Maimonian skepticism, considered as an account of the relation between thoughts and objects by which we are able to explain why any such account will lead to an *Antinomy of Thought*; i.e. why the structure of our articulations of thinking will have an aporetic character. The failure of dogmatism, for which I argued in this chapter, strengthens my claim that Maimonian skepticism is not a simple self-refuting skepticism, even though it does imply that we cannot have a *comprehensive account* of the relation between thoughts and objects. To put it in a provocative way, the point of Maimonian skepticism is that a *theory* is the wrong thing to look for as regards the relation between thoughts and objects — an adequate account of this relation will have to take the form of a *problem*. Or, in a perhaps more sensible way, the aporetic character of the structure of our articulations of thinking is not

---

[54] The claim that the "Vernunftideen" are actually products of the imagination is, according to Maimon, one of the main themes of his criticism of Kant. See the "Sechster Brief des Philaletes an Aenesidemus", in which Maimon presents a concise and numbered critique of Kant's *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. See *Logik*, particularly, pp. 422-424. See for a more detailed version of this criticism, *Logik*, pp. 201-207.

something to be *eliminated* but, rather, something to be *understood*, which means to appreciate it for what it is: *a problem*.

CONCLUSION

Twohundred years ago Salomon Maimon prepared the manuscript of his first book for publication. Now I prepare mine. Much has been published in the meantime — books that changed the characteristics of philosophy in almost every aspect. Nonetheless, I think we can still learn a lot from Maimon's penetrating analysis of the structure of our articulations of thinking, as I have tried to show in the preceding chapters. Of course this does not mean that I advocate a reversion to eighteenth century philosophy. Far from that. But it does mean that somehow we missed an important voice in the Kantian composition of our recent philosophical past: the voice of skepticism — *Maimonian* skepticism. Its point has been to resist the temptation to eliminate the aporetic character of the structure of our accounts of the relation between thoughts and objects, in favour of a rigorous attempt to *understand it as a problem.*

Let me repeat the central claims of the preceding chapters concisely, paying attention to the way in which they support the criticism of a number of contemporary American accounts of thinking that I developed in Part One of this study.

In Chapter Four, "Salomon Maimon's Reading of Kant", I introduced the idea of an *Antinomy of Thought*, arguing that it follows from Maimon's critical interpretation of a number of Kantian distinctions. These distinctions concerned (1) the *objects* of thought (*objects determined by thought* versus *objects determined outside of thought*), (2) the *linguistic medium* of thought (judgements that answer the *Quid facti* versus judgements that answer the *Quid juris*), and (3) the *mental*

medium of thought (*intuitions* versus *concepts*). They give rise to the idea of an *Antinomy of Thought* because a comprehensive account of thinking implies what is impossible for us to understand: (1) that the *objects* of thought are as well *objects determined outside of thought* as *objects determined by thought*, (2) that the *judgements* that express a real thought should answer both the *Quid juris* and the *Quid facti* , and (3) that the *mental states* by means of which it is possible to identify real objects are as well *intuitions* as *concepts*. As I have suggested, these distinctions, and their related formulations of the *Antinomy of Thought*, throw light upon the views behind the slogans with which I began this study. The need and the impossibility to do justice to the intuitions[1] that underly both the idea that thinking is like '*making* the world meaningful' and the idea that it is like '*finding* a meaningful world', give rise as well to the idea of the *Antinomy of Thought*, even though these slogans lead only to a rather suggestive and quite vague formulation of it.

Looking back at the first part of this thesis, it will now be evident that the *Antinomy of Thought* was the leading idea behind my criticism of Rosenberg and Rorty, as well as behind my approvement of Nagel's awareness of the aporetic character of our accounts of thinking. Let me put it this way: the plausibility of arguments against views that do not acknowledge the aporetic character of the structure of our accounts of the relation between thoughts and objects, can be explained in terms of the inescapability of the *Antinomy of Thought*.

The point of Chapter Five, "The Value of Skepticism", was to argue that Maimonian skepticism is not an uninteresting kind of self-refuting skepticism, but a defense of the *Antinomy of Thought*, as reflecting *more* than just a contradiction *in* or *of* the account of thinking it gives rise to. This did not mean that the aporetic involved is a matter of the relation between thoughts and objects itself, but only that it is not possible for us to distinguish between the account and that what the account is supposed to be about. In other words, although the Mai-

[1] Not in the technical sense of "Anschauung", but in the more general sense of particularly certain knowledge for which, however, it is very difficult or perhaps even impossible to give convincing reasons.

monian account of thinking leads to an *Antinomy of Thought*, it is an account that cannot be abandoned.

With respect to the Americans I criticised, it will be clear that this point played an important role in my critique of Nagel. His attempt to distinguish between thinking itself and our account of thinking led to problems, precisely because he neglected the modesty he himself urged for with respect to the Kantian attempt to deduce a transcendental fact out of the impossibility to distinguish between the form of our accounts and their content. Maimonian skepticism, or so I argued, is the attempt to preserve this modesty. Our accounts of the relation between thoughts and objects imply an *Antinomy*. Hence, the character of their structure is aporetic. We should, nevertheless, resist the temptation to solve the problem involved. All we should do, is to try to understand why our attempts to account for the relation between thoughts and objects lead to the *Antinomy of Thought*. We can do so, according to Maimon, with the help of the *Principle of Determinability*. This does not *solve* everything. It does not make everything *intelligible*, but it does make intelligible why an account of thinking implies something that is *unintelligible*. It doesn't help us understand something *of thinking itself*, but it does help us understand something *of our accounts of thinking*, namely, why they take the form of a *problem*.

The point of the last chapter, "The Failure of Dogmatism", was just to strengthen this conclusion, by means of a refutation of what seemed to be a possible way out of the *Antinomy of Thought*. Arguing that the dogmatic option (which is to assume that *objects determined outside of thought* will turn out to be identical to *objects determined by thought*) is not intelligible, I was able to improve the arguments in favour of a modest claim. There is no good reason for having positive views about the relation between thoughts and objects – all we can have is views about our *accounts* of the relation between thoughts and objects. These accounts have a structure that has an aporetic character. Any attempt to understand the relation between thoughts and objects will imply problems of intelligibility, since it will imply the *Antinomy of Thought*. Trying to understand *why* our attempts to understand thinking are intrinsically problematic is all there is left to do. If this tells us something about our finitude, it tells us no more than that *theories* about the

relation between thoughts and objects cannot be maintained, because accounts of thinking in terms of the *Antinomy of Thought* cannot be abandoned.

POSTSCRIPT

IRONY: A CHANGE OF ATTITUDE

"Getting to grips with irony seems to have something in common with gathering the mist; there is plenty to take hold of if only one could."

D.C. Muecke,
The Compass of Irony,
(1969)

In this study I argued that an account of thinking should not be an attempt to solve the tension between *finding* and *making*, between answering the *Quid facti* and answering the *Quid juris*, between *objects determined outside of thought* and *objects determined by thought*, between *intuitions* and *concepts*. Rather, such an account should be an attempt to understand this tension, to understand the aporetic character of the structure of our articulations of thinking, to understand why an account of the relation between thoughts and objects will take the form of a problem, why, in one more formulation, there is an *Antinomy of Thought*.

This conclusion sounds like a paradox. It is as if I argue against the temptation to solve problems of intelligibility, as if I claim that understanding has nothing to do with the dissolution of the unintelligible.

It is in order to make sense of this claim, that I will end up this study with a few remarks on the relevance of irony. Though I will make use of some ideas developed by Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829), the discussion is too far removed from his works to be rightly called to be *about* him.[1]

To begin with, there is an obvious irony in the question evoked by my conclusion: *Is thought intelligible?* The irony arises out of the tension between the sincerity of the question and the self-evident correctness of a positive answer. Of course, one is apt to react, of course

---

[1] It is not easy to become acquianted with Schlegel's philosophy. For, on the one hand there is hardly any literature on it, and on the other hand, until very recently (1964) the main texts were inaccessible. These main texts are, to my judgement, the *Philosophische Vorlesungen (1800-1807)*, and, particularly, *Die Entwicklung der Philosophie in zwölf Büchern*. See, *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe. Bd. XII-XIII* (München, 1964).

thought is intelligible! If not thought, what else could be! But then, in the midst of the eagerness of one's reaction, the uneasy peace and quiet of a sincere question announces itself. Whence this eagerness, if the positive answer is so self-evident? Naturally however, there is the reversal. In the midst of the all too serious confusion induced by the question, the uncomplicated confidence in a positive answer pops up. Don't bother too much, for it is only if a positive answer is implied to be correct that the question makes sense at all!

Out of this example we can discern the basic elements we need for an account of irony as the essential feature of a way in which we can learn to live with the aporetic character of the structure of our accounts of thinking. These elements are:

1. A tension between two opposite self-evident convictions.
2. A consciousness in motion, such that a deliberate support for either one of the convictions uncovers an unintended support for the other one.

I am not suggesting that every account of irony needs these elements. Irony is a notion with many friends and foes, and consequently there are many interpretations of it. I am not interested in these interpretations, because I am not interested in irony as the subject-matter of a systematic investigation. My subject-matter is the aporetic character of our accounts of the relation between thoughts and objects, and as I claim that this aporetic character is an intrinsic feature of the structure of any account of thinking, I see myself as bound to suggest a way in which we can learn to live with the paradox that follows from my conclusion. I think irony is such a way, granted we give it an interpretation in terms of the elements I just formulated. Such an interpretation is possible, and is reminiscent of the romantic irony as developed by Friedrich Schlegel.

Although I do not intend to argue for it as if it was a historical claim, I think it makes sense to suggest that Schlegel's notion of romantic irony could have been a response to the problem Maimon discovered in reading Kant. And, as I argued that Maimon's analysis of the problem is of importance for contemporary philosophy, so I will suggest

here that Schlegel's notion of romantic irony is likewise important too. Its main importance lies in the fact that it takes irony as a way of living with problems of intelligibility, rather than as a way of eliminating them—i.e. irony is, in terms of this notion, a way of relativizing the temptation to answer all questions.[2] And this could be relevant in situations in which we deal with philosophical accounts that possess an aporetic character.

In the following pages I will do two things. First I will introduce an initial interpretation of irony as a way of living with problems of intelligibility, making some references to Schlegel's notion of romantic irony. Subsequently I will use this account of irony in order to show how it might help us change our attitude towards analyses that yield paradoxical conclusions. This implies, I will suggest, the need to rethink our notion of method.

Since these are complicated matters, let me stress from the outset that my remarks in this postscript are not meant to be analyses—they are mere suggestions, indicating a way to rethink the philosophical enterprise as yielding problems, not theories.

The central element of the account of irony I am proposing here, is the idea of a consciousness in motion. This idea can be given a quite uncomplicated meaning in terms of a series of mental states that follow one another in time. Of course, such an interpretation assumes that it is possible to count mental states, which is far from obvious. Moreover, it makes use of a notion of succession which is perhaps not compatible with the idea of motion, since it cannot account for that which endures in motion.[3] But as far as the case of irony is concerned, these compli-

---

[2] As such, my attempt to propagate the relevance of irony is of a kind with Strawson's recent attempt to propagate the relevance of some varieties of naturalism as proper reactions to the skeptical challenge. See his *Skepticism & Naturalism. Some Varieties* (London, 1985). This theme is dominant as well in two other recent publications on the relevance of skepticism: David R. Hiley, *Philosophy in Question. Essays on a Pyrrhonian Theme* (Chicago, 1988), and Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary. Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago, 1988).

[3] This was one of the main problems of Henri Bergson, See a.o. *Essai sur les donneés immédiates de la conscience* (Paris, 1889).

cations need not confuse us. For a crucial aspect of irony is precisely that the succeeding mental state follows the preceding one in time, without it being possible to understand whether it followed *from* this previous mental state. This explains, I think, why irony has in ordinary discourse so often a humorous effect. What I am suggesting here is that the consciousness in motion which plays a crucial role in my account of irony, is a consciousness that passes from one mental state to another in a way that is not algorithmic, to use a contemporary phrase. In irony the mind does not move from one mental state to another by deliberately following an explicit and finite step-by-step procedure. Irony comes as a surprise, which is just to say that the succeeding mental state happens to be the unexpected and unintended result of an attempt to pursue the opposite. Thus, trying to support the self-evident conviction that thought is of course an intelligible affair, the troubling effect of a sincere question that begins to announce itself, as in the example above, is an occurrence of irony.

At this point it will be a good idea to say something about the character of the tension between the two opposite convictions which plays a role in the motion of the consciousness involved in an occurrence of irony. As I take it, this tension is of a kind with the tension we found in the analysis of Maimon which led to the *Antinomy of Thought*. As I am focusing now on consciousness, let me try to state my point in terms of the tension between *intuitions* and *concepts*.[4] According to Maimon, an intuition is a mental state which is an awareness of a certain qualified region of space. This intuition is present as or in a judgement which is, according to Maimon, a product of the imagination. In contrast, a concept is a mental state which consists of a specific rule of the understanding. This concept is present as or in a judgement which is, according to Maimon, governed by the *Principle of Determinability*. What is important now, is that a judgement which is supposed to be an expression of a real thought should be a presen-

[4] But, as became clear from the analysis I gave in the previous part, the same point can be stated in terms of the tension between *finding* and *making*, between answering the *Quid facti* and answering the *Quid juris*, between *objects determined outside of thought* and *objects determined by thought*. After all, the ineliminability of the *Antinomy of Thought* can be shown in terms of each of these paired notions.

tation of both an intuition and a concept. But, as argued in the final part of this thesis, we cannot understand judgements to be such double presentations. Therefore, in our attempt to understand a judgement, we will have to take them in a one-sided way. Thus, to take the example from the introduction, in judging that the chair I sit on is a typical twentieth century wheeled office chair with all kinds of moving parts, I will either be tempted to take it as a presentation of a concept (a location in a conceptual framework identified by means of rules of the understanding) or as a presentation of an intuition (an awareness of a certain qualified region of space, described with the help of the creative imagination). Either way I must go wrong, since I'll have to neglect the *Antinomy of Thought* and to assume the plausibility of an indefensible dogmatism.

Irony, I now suggest, is a way of eliminating such a dogmatism. Not theoretically, as was the case with Maimon's argument against empirical dogmatism, but practically — as a way of living. For, as I will argue, an attempt to understand my judgement about my chair as a presentation of a concept will lead to a support of the opposite interpretation of the judgement as a presentation of an intuition. And vice versa.

The point can perhaps be stated more convincingly in terms of Schlegel's notion of romantic irony. According to Schlegel, the tension present in an occurrence of irony is a manifestation of the tension between the finite and the infinite.[5] Thus, in understanding what would

[5] The theme of the tension between the finite and the infinite is of utmost importance in Schlegel's writings. A clear and well-considered statement of it can be found in the part of *Die Entwicklung der Philosophie in zwölf Büchern* called "Die Psychologie als Theorie des Bewußtseins", in *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe. Bd. XIII* (München, 1964), pp. 324-408. "To unify in life this infinity that we find in us, with the feeling of limitation, one needs the help of the *concept of becoming*. Just thus it becomes possible: if there is no *being*, but only *becoming*, then the finite, although extensively limited, will intensively be infinite by means of infinite variation and alteration (...) a becoming infinitude, although infinite, is not yet ready, and therefore finite."; "Um nun diese Unendlichkeit, die wir in uns finden, mit dem Gefühle der Beschränktheit im Leben zu vereinigen, muß man den *Begriff des Werden* zu hilfe nehmen. Bloß hiedurch wird es möglich: gibt es kein *Sein*, sondern nur *Werden*, so ist das Endliche, wenn auch extensiv begrenzt, doch intensiv durch die unendliche Mannigfaltigkeit und Veränderlichkeit immer *unendlich*. (...) Ein werdendes Unendliches aber ist gleichsam ein Unendliches, das noch nicht fertig, und insofern endlich ist." pp. 334-335.

make a judgement a presentation of a real thought (it being a presentation of both a concept and an intuition) we are aware of the infinite, but in every attempt to understand a particular judgement (as either a presentation of a concept or of an intuition) we realize our finite mode of thinking. Now, this does not mean that we had better sit down in despair, realizing that we are not well equiped for the task of thinking. Not at all. After all, as long as there are judgements, we cannot resist the temptation to try to understand them. So we had better try enthusiastically. That is part of irony too.[6]

It might seem as if this is at variance with what I said above. For there I stated that irony is a way of relativizing the temptation to answer all questions. But now it seems as if Schlegel accepts that we cannot resist such a temptation, and he even seems to suggest that part of irony consists in the (no doubt futile) attempt to try for answers. Should it not be better to forget Schlegel, and, for that matter, to forget irony as well, and make a plea for some kind of Zen-inspired training to learn to resist the temptation to think at all? I don't know. But as far as irony is concerned, it is not the case that the enthusiasm to try for answers is incompatible with the relativization of the temptation to answer all questions. Enthusiasm is not, in any way, related to dogmatism. To put it this way, while dogmatism is motivated by the answer, enthusiasm is motivated by the question. It is the presence of a judgement that *asks* for understanding which evokes our enthusiasm. And it is our enthusiasm, our taking of the judgement in a one-sided way (as either the presentation of a concept or of an intuition) that is needed to realize an occurrence of irony, a consciousness in motion. Such a consciousness in motion is an awareness of the 'idea'[7] that both "*die Welt noch unvollendet ist*"[8] and "*wir nur ein Stück von uns selbst sind*".[9]

---

[6] ibid. pp. 393ff. Schlegel makes use of both "Begeisterung" and "Enthusiasmus" to indicate our eagerness to find answers, i.e. to make sense, as part of irony as a mode of living with the tension between the finite and the infinite. See also *Vorlesung über die Transzendentalphilosophie* (in Band XII), p. 42.

[7] *"Idee"* is a technical term in Schlegel's philosophy; it is an inexpressible consciousness of an encompassing totality which consists, as a totality, of opposites. "An idea is *a comprehension of the whole* (...) Therefore we say *idea* rather than *concept*; because that to which it is supposed to refer, cannot be grasped in a concept according to its ordinary meaning, because it is *incomprehensible with respect to its expression*, for

A good way to begin to explain this rather lunatic statement is to take a look at one of the early *Athenäums-Fragmente*:

> An idea is a concept completed up to irony, an absolute synthesis of absolute antitheses, a permanent alternation between two conflicting thoughts induced by itself[10]

The fragment aims to explain that an 'idea' is somehow a synthesis of antitheses. It consists in a tension between two opposite thoughts in such a way that this tension realizes an alternation between the two thoughts in one consciousness. This alternation, now, is realized by means of "ein bis zur Ironie vollendeter Begriff". That is, by enthusiastically defending a one-sided interpretation of a judgement (as if it presented for example a transparant and discursive rule of the understanding — i.e. a concept), we arrive, finally, at a point at which this interpretation unmasks itself as one-sided, and, consequently, as false (as well as true). This unmasking happens by means of an unintended awareness of the plausibility of a radically opposed interpretation. The implication of this is that it is, strictly speaking, not simply correct to maintain that the interpretation unmasks *itself*. It is the awareness of the infinite which protests against the finite way in which it is being thought. Irony occurs just at the point where a consciousness begins to believe it grasps the *whole* meaning of a judgement in terms of a single, unequivocal interpretation. Thus, irony wouldn't have occured if there was no enthusiasm, if the consciousness was not eager to grasp the *whole* meaning of a judgement in terms of a one-sided interpretation. In other words, irony, i.e. the consciousness in motion which is

---

example, *Not-I equals I.*"; "Ein *Idee* ist *ein Wissen des Ganzen.* (...) So sagen wir *Idee* statt *Begriff*; weil das, was damit bezeichnet werden soll, in einem Begriff, nach der gewöhnlichen Bedeutung, nicht gefaßt werden kann, und gleichsam *unbegreiflich* ist, nämlich *in Absicht des Ausdrucks.* Z.B. *Nichtich ist gleich Ich.*" (*Vorlesung über die Transzendentalphilosophie*, pp. 4-5)

[8] ibid. p. 42

[9] *Die Entwicklung der Philosophie in zwölf Büchern*, p. 337.

[10] "Eine Idee ist ein bis zur Ironie vollendeter Begriff, eine absolute Synthesis absoluter Antithesen, der stete sich selbst erzeugende Wechsel zwei streitender Gedanken.", Athenäums-Fragment nr. 121

an awareness of an 'idea', can only be realized by means of an enthusiastic attempt to grasp the infinite in terms of the finite.

That the tension between the finite and the infinite manifests itself as a tension between two opposite (finite) convictions, is just to be expected, granted our inability to understand a judgement as a presentation of both a concept and an intuition (to hold on to Maimon's notions), i.e. granted our finite understanding. That we become in the irony aware of an 'idea' that both "*die Welt noch unvollendet ist*" and "*wir nur ein Stück von uns selbst sind*", is something, however, that needs more explication. Of course these phrases are images: attempts to present an 'idea', a synthesis of antitheses. Hence, they have to fail beforehand. That is their irony. But it is exactly their success that unfolds itself in their ironical failure.

As regards the world, irony shows that our notion of the world is necessarily partial. We can think of the world as either a set of *objects determined outside of thought* or a set of *objects determined by thought,* but either interpretation is unmasked as incomplete. There must be more to the world than we can think of. Not in the trivial sense that our world is a proper subset of the world. No, the point is that a world has to be a set of objects, but the only kinds of objects that are possible (as objects) are either objects that cannot yet be thought of as objects (*objects determined outside of thought*) or objects that cannot yet exist as objects (*objects determined by thought*). Thus, it is the *Antinomy of Thought* which comes to consciousness in irony in the image of a world that is not yet complete.[11] This image makes it possible to live with the *Antinomy*: irony turns Maimonian skepticism into a constructive motive to try for completeness. I will return to this, but let me first point out the irony of the awareness of the 'idea' that we are but a part of ourselves. Basically, the point is just the reverse of the one with respect to the world. Any object implies over against it a conscious subject. This subject now is unmasked in irony as necessarily partial. We cannot be the beings that think of the world as either a set of *objects determined outside of thought* or a set of *objects determined by*

[11] This idea occurs, at times, in the writings of Maimon as well. See, for example, *Transscendentalphilosophie*, pp. 33-35.

thought. We have to be both, even though we cannot be, since if we were both, we would no longer stand over against the world. Therefore, all we can ever be is a part of ourselves, which is of course a flagrant contradiction but, again, in the irony of its failure the awkward nature of our lives uncovers itself in a meaningful way. For, there is a constructive element in this occurrence of irony. We live our lives essentially in being a consciousness in motion, i.e. our life exists in the moment of irony in which we realize that our complete self shows itself precisely in the 'idea' of our being just a part of ourselves.[12]

That irony turns Maimonian skepticism into a constructive motive to try for completeness in order to be able to live with the *Antinomy of Thought,* is the suggestion I want to put forward in this postscript. The basic elements of my account of irony:

1. A tension between two opposite self-evident convictions; and
2. A consciousness in motion, such that a deliberate support for either one of the convictions uncovers an unintended support for the other one,

reflect the influence of the *Antinomy of Thought* on our ability and inability to understand judgements. Any judgement expressing a real thought can be accounted for in two opposite ways. We have seen this before: a judgement can be taken as (1) either the product of *thinking as making* or *thinking as finding*; (2) either about *objects determined by thought* or *objects determined outside of thought*; (3) either answering the *Quid facti* or the *Quid juris*; (4) either consisting in a *concept* or an *intuition*. Either way we take it is necessarily partial — but the remaining part will turn out to be the incompatible opposite. Hence the *Antinomy*.

Just this conclusion however (this "Hence the *Antinomy*"), is intelligible only at the moment we grasp the partiality of one account of a judgement by realizing the value of the opposing account. The *Antinomy of Thought* manifests itself through the second element, i.e. in a consciousness in motion. Thus, Maimonian skepticism, which is, as I

---

[12] This idea is also a Maimonian theme. See *Transscendentalphilosophie*, pp. 155-166.

have argued, nothing but a defense of the inescapability of the *Antinomy of Thought,* needs the occurring of irony in order to make itself appear intelligible. Therefore, it will be good for this Maimonian skepticism to strive for irony, which means, as I explained above, that it will be good to try for completeness with enthusiasm. (It is, perhaps, superfluous to notice the irony in this advice.)

It is important to point out the commitments involved. It should be stressed that to strive for irony has, for Maimonian skepticism, a logical primacy. This means that to try for completeness gets a 'chronological primacy', as this is the appropriate means to strive for irony. This is, however, fundamentally to be distinguished from the Fichtean or Hegelian notions of an infinite striving to expand the boundaries of inquiry.[13] I am defending Maimonian skepticism. I take the *Antinomy of Thought* seriously. My plea for enthusiasm with respect to whatever attempt to grasp the infinite in terms of the finite, is a plea for irony, a plea for a consciousness in motion, a plea for the awareness of the infinite by means of an 'idea' (in Schlegel's technical meaning of the word) which uncovers our finitude as well. The point of the infinite striving for irony by means of a move in the opposite direction is not in any way to be associated with a notion of growth. We do not approach completeness. Wisdom is not like that. It is much more like food — thinking resembles eating in a significant way. We are hungry and desire food, and as we find it (or make it) we eat, an activity which eradicates our hunger. So we loose our desire for food, not because we have had all of food, but because we have had enough of it. We loose our appetite which does not last for long, however. And so we go again, never getting enough but often having enough. Clearly, there is a point in associating the process of nutrition and digestion with the notion of growth. But so there is in associating it with ageing. Neither way it has to do with completeness as the realization of the absolute. It has to do with the paradox of life, and so has my plea for irony as a way of living with the *Antinomy of Thought.*

---

[13] Even though it might, historically speaking, be true that Maimon cleared the way for German Idealism (See, for example, Samuel Atlas *From Critical to Speculative Idealism,* and Ernst Cassirer *Das Erkenntnisproblem*), Maimon himself was a skeptic, and not, at least not in an interesting sense of the word, an idealist, as I argued above, p. 140.

Perhaps the best way to vindicate this plea for irony is to show how it might help us change our attitude towards analyses that yield paradoxical conclusions. Therefore, let me show how irony might help us approve of the aporetic character of our accounts of the relation between thoughts and objects.

Suppose I judge that the chair I sit on is a typical twentieth century wheeled office chair with all kinds of moving parts, and that its colour is anthracite. It is possible to take this judgement to be informative about a certain object because it identifies a location in a conceptual framework that is occupied by the object in question. It is also possible to take the judgement to be informative about this object because it specifies some of the real properties of a particular object upon which I happen to sit at this very moment. Claiming that we have to take the judgement both ways is correct, but it leads, as argued, to the *Antinomy of Thought*. We cannot defend this claim coherently. That was the point of my criticism of Rosenberg, Rorty and Nagel: the structure of our articulations of thinking has an intrinsically aporetic character. It is because of that, that I suggest a change of attitude, a change towards irony. Well, what does it amount to?

In order to keep things as simple as possible, suppose I just focus upon the colour of my chair, and suppose I think the judgement that my chair is anthracite is informative because it points out a location in my conceptual framework. The location is labeled "anthracite", and a specification of this location will at least have to point out that it is a location of colour, like, for example, "red", "yellow" and "blue". Colours, to say just a bit more, have to do with the surfaces of objects and with the way in which these surfaces reflect light. Now, what is the meaning of my judgement, according to this interpretation? Something like the following sounds reasonable enough. If "anthracite" is a colour, and if colours have to do with the surfaces of objects and with the ways in which these surfaces reflect light, then the judgement that my chair is anthracite will mean that my chair is an object whose surface reflect light in such a way that the resulting colour occupies the location "anthracite" in my conceptual framework.

But what is it exactly that is realized, or done, or said by means of my judgement? The judgement certainly did not just point out a location in a conceptual framework labeled "anthracite". Such things are done by judgements as "Anthracite is a colour", or "Anthracite is between grey and black". No, the judgement must somehow have succeeded in expressing that it is my chair (or its colour) that occupies the location labeled "anthracite". But, how can it do that? My chair does certainly not occupy this location in a literal way. Well, then, what, exactly, occupies this location? Not, I presume, a 'mental image' of my chair. For, what would that be? Another location in my conceptual framework? It will not do to suggest that the judgement just makes a connection between a number of locations in a conceptual framework. For, there is no definite description that would capture the indexical "this" or "my", or, to put it even stronger, there is no definite description that would capture the essential part "There is an x such that x...".

If we resist the temptation to take refuge in the hopeless notion of an "ubiquitous, scheme-neutral input"[14], it seems we are bound to loose the object the judgement is supposed to be about (my chair). Realizing this result, as for example in Quine's statement that "to be is to be a value of a variable", is an occurrence of irony. For, after all, it is so overwhelmingly clear that I do not sit on a bunch of values of a number of variables. I just sit on an object, my chair: a typical twentieth century wheeled office chair with all kinds of moving parts, and with an anthracite colour.

What I suggest, then, is that the attempt to support the account of judgements as identifying a particular location in a conceptual framework implies under certain conditions a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*. This suggestion is vague in two ways: the nature of the conditions is not specified and neither is the kind of *reductio*. As regards the first I think we need a specification of the conditions as depending upon the attitude of the consciousness involved, which should be an attitude sensitive to the possibility of an occurrence of irony. As regards the second I think we need a specification of the *reductio* as not being an

---

[14] See Nicholas Rescher, "Conceptual Schemes" in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy V*, ed. P.A. French (Minneapolis, 1980), p. 336.

ordinary *reductio ad absurdum*; i.e. not one that ends with a formal, logical contradiction, but one that ends with a contradiction because the consciousness involved begins to move in such a way that the initial support for an account of the judgement as identifying a particular location in a conceptual framework, turns out to entail a support for the opposing account that the judgements actually are about real characteristics of actual objects. That is, the *reductio* I am speaking of does not have a dead end. It does not just terminate in a contradiction that opens up the possibility of saying anything whatsoever. No, the movement of the consciousness involved is productive in the sense that it uncovers, via an absurdity (i.e. through irony), the plausibility of the opposing account.

Of course, things do not end here. We should not loose our sensitivity for irony. The opposing account is not better, even though it appears at the moment of the irony I just discussed to be the only viable account. But, there is an ironical end to this account as well. For, imagine that we believe that the judgement about my chair is informative because it specifies some of the real properties of the object upon which I happen to sit at this very moment.

Let us again keep things as simple as possible, and focus just on the anthracite colour of my chair. Well, what does it mean that my chair has an anthracite colour? On this account, we are aware of a real object (to be identified by means of spatio-temporal coordinates), and we take it that one of the essential features of this object is its anthracite colour. The problem, definitely, is with the phrase "essential feature"; apparently most seriously with "essential", but, actually, the real problem arises with respect to "anthracite" being a *feature* of my chair. For, how can that be, or, rather, what does that mean? As far as understanding goes, we can understand that a colour can be anthracite, and that a surface can have a colour, but we cannot get closer to my chair than by means of spatio-temporal coordinates. And it is very hard to understand what it means to say that a part of space-time has a surface, and that the reflected light on this surface has a colour, and that this colour is anthracite. Thus, supporting the interpretation that anthracite is a feature of an actually existing object, leads to the conclusion that the link between the object and the colour is incomprehensible as long as

we do not have a conceptual access to the object, i.e. as long as we do not take the judgement as identifying a location in a conceptual framework. In other words, again there is the irony that even though we have the object right beforehand, this does not mean at all that we are able to understand what it means that the object has an anthracite colour. In order to be able to understand that, we will need some rules of the understanding that relate my chair to its colour.

The point of this example is not to prove or defend the untenability of one-sided accounts of judgements. For arguments in favour of that claim were developed in the previous parts of this thesis. No, the point here is to indicate how a sensitivity to the irony of the intelligibility of the relation between thoughts and objects, might help us see the optimistic, constructive force of Maimonian skepticism. Understanding the *Antinomy of Thought* does not rob us of our appetite for understanding the meaning of judgements. Quite the contrary. Every failure to grasp the relation between thoughts and objects by means of an attempt to understand the meaning of a judgement gives us new hope, because every such failure presents itself in a moment of irony: the failure uncovers the plausibility of the opposite account. What is more, being sensitive to irony prevents us from getting tired or sick of never being able to reach the final truth. For in irony there is not only the awareness of the failure of a specific account, but, besides that, there is the evocation of our enthusiasm for the opposite account, and, moreover, there is the satisfaction of a consciousness of the 'idea' that both "*die Welt noch unvollendet ist*" and "*wir nur ein Stück von uns selbst sind*", i.e. there is a sense of the presence of the infinite in the finite. In other words, being sensitive to irony makes it possible for us to live with the *Antinomy of Thought*, because irony makes us (1) try for completeness, and (2) aware of the fact that the satisfaction of understanding is a matter of understanding the problematic, aporetic nature of our articulations of the relation between thoughts and objects.

I think this plea for irony arouses the need to rethink our notion of method. Irony is not something that can be realized following a procedure. It is not a goal that can be approached. Irony is an event. We can, perhaps, provoke it, but we will need a quite subtle attitude for

such a provocation to be successful. For on the one hand we will have to try for completeness, but on the other hand we have to remain sensitive to the possibility of an occurrence of irony. Thus, in our enthusiastic attempt to grasp the whole meaning of a judgement by means of one account of it, we should resist the temptation to loose ourselves in some kind of dogmatism. This means that we should be able to *play a honest dogmatic,* succeeding as we fail, failing as long as we succeed. That is perhaps the only way to live with the *Antinomy of Thought* .

APPENDIX

Many notions used throughout this study have a technical meaning, partly because they belong to the jargon of Anglo-Saxon Kant-scholars, and partly because they refer to German notions used by Maimon in a special way. The following list might serve as a guide.

Antinomy of Thought	Antinomie des Denkens
appearance	Erscheinung
category	Kategorie, reines Verhältnisbegriff
concept	Begriff
consciousness	Bewußtsein
Principle of Determinability	Satz der Bestimmbarkeit
determinable	Bestimmbares
determination	Bestimmung
experience	Erfahrung
empirical realism	empirischer Realismus
the given	das Gegebene
imagination	Einbildungskraft
intuition	Anschauung
judgement	Urteil
object determined by thought	durch das Denken bestimmtes Objekt
object determined outside of thought	außer das Denken bestimmtes Objekt
receptivity	Rezeptivität
representation	Vorstellung
sensibility	Sinnlichkeit
shape	Figur
space	Raum
spontaneity	Spontanität
thing in itself	Ding an sich
time	Zeit
transcendental idealism	transzendentaler Idealismus
understanding	Verstand

LITERATURE

ALLISON, HENRY E., *Kant's Transcendental Idealism. An Interpretation and Defense* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1983)

AMERIKS, KARL, "Kant's Transcendental Deduction as a Regressive Argument", in *Kantstudien* 1978, pp. 273-287

AMERIKS, KARL, "Recent Work on Kant's Theoretical Philosophy", in *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1982, pp. 1-24

AQUILA, RICHARD, "Things in Themselves and Appearances: Intentionality and Reality in Kant", in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 1979, pp. 293-307

AQUILA, RICHARD, *Representational Mind. A Study of Kant's Theory of Knowledge* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1983)

ATLAS, SAMUEL, "Maimon and Maimonides", in *Hebr U C A 23*, 1950-1951, pp. 517-547

ATLAS, SAMUEL, "Solomon Maimon and Spinoza", in *Hebr U C A 30*, 1959, pp. 233-285.

ATLAS, SAMUEL, "Solomon Maimon's Doctrine of Infinite Reason and its Historical Relations", in *Journal of the History of Ideas 13*, 1952, pp. 168-187

ATLAS, SAMUEL, "Solomon Maimon's Philosophy of Language Critically Examined", in *Hebr U C A 28*, 1957, pp. 253-288.

ATLAS, SAMUEL, *From Critical to Speculative Idealism: The Philosophy of Salomon Maimon* (Nijhoff, The Hague, 1964)

BAUMGARDT, DAVID, "The Ethics of Salomon Maimon (1753-1800)", in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* , 1963, pp. 199-210

BAYNES, KENNETH, ET.AL., eds.,*After Philosophy. End or Transformation* (MIT, Cambridge, 1987)

BECK, LEWIS WHITE, *Essays on Kant and Hume* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1978)

BEISER, FREDERICK C., *The Fate of Reason. German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1987)

BENNETT, JONATHAN, *Kant's Analytic* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1966)

BENNETT, JONATHAN, *Kant's Dialectic* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1974)

BERGMAN, SAMUEL HUGO, *The Philosophy of Solomon Maimon* (Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1967)

BERNSTEIN, RICHARD, "Philosophy in the Conversation of Mankind" in *Review of Metaphysics* 1980, pp. 745-775.

BRANSEN, JAN, "Wijsgerige antropologie en realisme", in *Werken met Wijsbegeerte: een Cultuurprobleem*, G.M. Huussen, H.E.S. Woldring (eds), (Eburon, Delft, 1986), pp. 77-84.

BRANSEN, JAN, "Rationaliteit tussen intuïtie en begrip", in *Congresbundel Filosofiedag Maastricht 1987*, W. Callebaut, P. Mostert (eds), (Eburon, Delft, 1988), pp. 25-29.

CAPUTO, JOHN, "The Thought of Being and the Conversation of Mankind: the Case of Heidegger and Rorty" in *Review of Metaphysics* 1983, pp. 661-685.

CASSIRER, ERNST (ED.), *Immanuel Kants Werke*, 11 volumes (Bruno Cassirer Verlag, Berlin, 1912-1918)

CASSIRER, ERNST, *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit*, three volumes (Bruno Cassirer Verlag, Berlin, 1906-1923)

CASSIRER, ERNST, *Kants Leben und Lehre* (Bruno Cassirer Verlag, Berlin, 1918); translation: *Kant's Life and Thought* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1981)

CASSIRER, ERNST, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, three volumes (Bruno Cassirer Verlag, Berlin, 1923-1929); translation: *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1957)

CAVELL, STANLEY, *In Quest of the Ordinary. Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1988)

DAVIDSON, DONALD, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983)

DESCOMBES, VINCENT, (ED.), *Modern French Philosophy*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980)

GADAMER, HANS-GEORG, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Mohr, Tübingen, 1960)

GOLDMAN, ALVIN, "Book Review of*Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* " in *The Philosophical Review 90* 1981, pp. 424-429.

GOODMAN, NELSON, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Hackett, Indianapolis, 1978)

GUÉROULT, M., *La Philosophie transcendentale de Salomon Maimon* (Paris, 1929)

GUYER, PAUL, "Book Review of *Identität und Objektivität*" in *Journal of Philosophy 1976*, pp. 151-167

HABERMAS, JÜRGEN, *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne* (Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt /Main, 1984)

HABERMAS, JÜRGEN, *Nachmetaphysisches Denken*, (Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/ Main, 1988)

HANDWERK, GARY J., *Irony and Ethics in Narrative. From Schlegel to Lacan* (Yale University Press, Yale, 1985)

HENRICH, DIETER, *Identität und Objektivität, eine Untersuchung über Kants transzendentale Deduktion* (Carl Winter, Heidelberg, 1976)

HILEY, DAVID R., *Philosophy in Question. Essays on a Pyrrhonian Theme* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1988)

HORSTMANN, ROLF P., "Maimon's Criticism of Reinhold's 'Satz des Bewußtseins'", in *Proceedings of the 3rd International Kant Congress*, ed. L.W. Beck, (Reidel, Dordrecht, 1972), pp. 330-338.

JUDGE, BRENDA, *Thinking about Things: A Philosophical Study of Representation* (Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, 1985)

KANT, IMMANUEL, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Riga, 1781/1787)

KANT, IMMANUEL, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Riga, 1790)

KANT, IMMANUEL, *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik* (Riga, 1783)

KATZOFF, CHARLOTTE, "Salomon Maimon's Critique of Kant's Theory of Consciousness" in *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung 35*, 1981, pp. 185-195

KATZOFF, CHARLOTTE, "Solomon Maimon's Interpretation of Kant's Copernican Revolution" in *Kantstudien* 1975, pp. 342-356

KATZOFF, CHARLOTTE, *The Object of Knowledge in the Philosophy of Solomon Maimon and its Relationship to the Thing in Itself in Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (Diss. Colombia University, 1971)

KÖRNER, STEPHAN, "The Impossibility of Transcendental Deductions", in *Kant Studies Today*, ed. L.W. Beck, 1969, pp. 230-244

KUNTZE, FRIEDRICH, *Die Philosophie Salomon Maimons* (Carl Winter, Heidelberg, 1912)

LAUENER, H., "Das Problem der Kausalität bei Salomon Maimon", in *Kantstudien 59*, 1968, pp. 199-211.

LAUENER, HENRI, *Hume und Kant* (Franke Verlag, Bern, 1969)

MAIMON, SALOMON, *Die Kathegorien des Aristoteles. Mit Anmerkungen erläutert und als Propädeutik zu einer neuen Theorie des Denkens dargestellt* (Berlin, 1794) in *Gesammelte Werke VI*

MAIMON, SALOMON, *Gesammelte Werke* (Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, Hildesheim, 1965)

MAIMON, SALOMON, *Kritische Untersuchungen über den menschlichen Geist oder das höhere Erkenntnis- und Willensvermögen* (Leipzig, 1797) in *Gesammelte Werke VII*

MAIMON, SALOMON, *Philosophisches Wörterbuch oder Beleuchtung der wichtigsten Gegenstände der Philosophie in alphabetischer Ordnung* (Berlin, 1791) in *Gesammelte Werke III*

MAIMON, SALOMON, *Salomon Maimons Lebensgeschichte* (Berlin 1792) in *Gesammelte Werke I* (also reprinted by Insell Verlag, Frankfurt/Main, 1984)

MAIMON, SALOMON, *Streifereien im Gebiete der Philosophie* (Berlin 1793) in *Gesammelte Werke IV*

MAIMON, SALOMON, *Versuch einer neuen Logik oder Theorie des Denkens. Nebst angehängten Briefen des Philaletes an Aenesidemus* (Berlin, 1794) in *Gesammelte Werke V* (also reprinted by the Kantgesellschaft, Heidelberg, 1912)

MAIMON, SALOMON, *Versuch über die Transscendentalphilosophie. Mit einem Anhang über die symbolische Erkenntniß und Anmerkungen* (Berlin, 1790) in *Gesammelte Werke II*

MCGINN, COLIN, "Critical Notice of *The View from Nowhere* . By Thomas Nagel", in *Mind 96*, 1987, pp. 263-272.

MCGINN, COLIN, "The structure of content", in *Thought and Object. Essays on Intentionality*, ed. Andrew Woodfield (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1982)

MCGINN, COLIN, *The Subjective View* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1983)

MEAD, GEORGE HERBERT, *Mind, Self & Society* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1934)

MOORE, A.W., "Book Review of *The View from Nowhere*. By Thomas Nagel", in *The Philosophical Quarterly Vol. 37* , 1987, pp. 323-327.

NAGEL, THOMAS, "The Limits of Objectivity", in S. McMurrin (ed.), *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, vol. I* (University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City, 1980), pp. 75-141

NAGEL, THOMAS, "What is it like to be a bat?", in *The Philosophical Review* 1974, (reprinted in *Mortal Questions*)

NAGEL, THOMAS, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979)

NAGEL, THOMAS, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1986)

PETER, KLAUS, *Idealismus als Kritik. Friedrich Schlegels Philosophie der unvollendeten Welt*, (Verlag W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, 1973).

PEURSEN, C.A. VAN, *Feiten, Waarden, Gebeurtenissen. Een deiktische ontologie* (Meulenhoff, Amsterdam, 1965)

POTOK, HERMAN HAROLD, *The Rationalism and Skepticism of Solomon Maimon* (Ph.D. 1965, University of Pennsylvania)

PUTNAM, HILARY, "Reason and Realism" in *Meaning and the Moral Sciences*, pp. 123-138 (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1976)

RAJCHMAN, J. AND C. WEST, (EDS.), *Post-Analytic Philosophy*, (Colombia University Press, New York, 1985)

REINHOLD, KARL LEONARD, *Versuch einer neuen Theorie des menschlichen Vorstellungsvermögens* (Widtmann und Marke, Jena, 1789)

RESCHER, NICHOLAS, *Conceptual Idealism* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1973)

RORTY, RICHARD (ED), *The Linguistic Turn* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1967)

RORTY, RICHARD, "Epistemological Behaviorism and the De-Transcendentalization of Analytical Philosophy", in *Neue Hefte für Philosophie 14*, 1978, pp. 115-142.

RORTY, RICHARD, "Solidarity or Objectivity?", in *Post-Analytic Philosophy*, ed. J. Rajchman & C. West, (Colombia University Press, New York, 1985)

RORTY, RICHARD, "The World Well Lost", in *The Journal of Philosophy* 1972 (reprinted in *Consequences of Pragmatism)*

RORTY, RICHARD, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1982)

RORTY, RICHARD, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989)

RORTY, RICHARD, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1979)

ROSEN, STANLEY, "Book Review of Rorty, R., *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* " in *Review of Metaphysics*, 1980, pp. 799-802.

ROSEN, STANLEY, *Nihilism* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1969)

ROSEN, STANLEY, *The Limits of Analysis* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1980)

ROSENBERG, JAY F., *Linguistic Representations* (Reidel, Dordrecht, 1974)

ROSENBERG, JAY F., *One World and Our Knowledge of It* (Reidel, Dordrecht, 1980)

ROSENBERG, JAY F., *The Thinking Self* (Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1986)

ROSENTHAL, L., "Salomon Maimons Versuch über die Transzendentalphilosophie und sein Verhältnis zu Kants transzendentaler Aesthetik und Analytik" in *Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, pp. 233-302

ROTENSTREICH, NATHAN, "On the Position of Maimon's Philosophy", in *Review of Metaphysics 21*, 1968, pp. 534-545

ROTENSTREICH, NATHAN, *Experience and Its Systematization. Studies in Kant* (Nijhoff, The Hague, 1972)

SCHIFFER, STEPHEN, *Remnants of Meaning* (MIT, Cambridge, 1987)

SCHLEGEL, FRIEDRICH, *Die Entwicklung der Philosophie in Zwölf Büchern*, in *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe, Bd XII-XIII*, ed. Ernst Behler, Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, München, 1964.

SCHLEGEL, FRIEDRICH, *Die Jenaer Vorlesung über Transzendentalphilosophie*, in *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe, Bd XII*, ed. Ernst Behler, Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, München, 1964.

SCHLEGEL, FRIEDRICH, *Fragmente*, in *Kritische Schriften*, ed. W. Rasch, (München, 1964)

SCHULZE, G.E., *Aenesidemus oder über die Fundamente der von dem Herrn Prof. Reinhold in Jena gelieferten Elementar-Philosophie* (Jena, 1792; reprinted by the Kantgesellschaft, Heidelberg, 1912)

SEARLE, JOHN , (ED.),*The Philosophy of Language*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1971)

SEARLE, JOHN, *Intentionality: an essay in the philosophy of mind* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983)

STRAWSON, PETER, *Naturalism and Skepticism: some varieties* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1985)

STRAWSON, PETER, *The Bounds of Sense. An Essay on Kant's* Critique of Pure Reason (Methuen & Co, London, 1966)

STROHSCHNEIDER-KOHRS, INGRID, *Die romantische Ironie in Theorie und Gestaltung* (Max Niemeyer Verlag, Tübingen, 1960)

STROUD, BARRY, "Transcendental Arguments and 'Epistemological Naturalism'" in *Philosophical Studies* 1977, pp. 105-115

STROUD, BARRY, "Transcendental Arguments" in *The Journal of Philosophy* 1968, pp. 241-256

STROUD, BARRY, *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1984)

WALKER, RALPH, *Kant. The Arguments of the Philosophers* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1978)

WEINSHEIMER, JOEL, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1985)

WILLIAMS, MICHAEL, "Coherence, Justification and Truth", in *Review of Metaphysics* 1980.

WOLFF, ROBERT PAUL, *Kant's Theory of Mental Activity* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1963)

WOODFIELD, ANDREW, (ED.), *Thought and Object. Essays on Intentionality*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1982)

ZAC, SYLVAIN, "l'Idee de chose en soi dans la philosophie de Salomon Maimon" in *Archive de Philosophie 51*, 1988, pp. 213-229.

ZAC, SYLVAIN, "Salomon Maimon et les malentendus du langage", in *Revue de Metaphysique et de Morale 91*, 1986, pp. 181-202.

ZAC, SYLVAIN, *Salomon Maïmon. Critique de Kant* (Les éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1988)

INDEX

(page numbers in italics refer to crucial passages)

1. Subjects

2. Names

Nijhoff International Philosophy Series

1. N. Rotenstreich: *Philosophy, History and Politics.* Studies in Contemporary English Philosophy of History. 1976 ISBN Pb 90-247-1743-4
2. J.T.J. Srzednicki: *Elements of Social and Political Philosophy.* 1976 ISBN Pb 90-247-1744-2
3. W. Tatarkiewicz: *Analysis of Happiness.* Translated from Polish by E. Rothert and D. Zieliński. 1976 ISBN 90-247-1807-4
4. K. Twardowski: *On the Content and Object of Presentations.* A Psychological Investigation. Translated from Polish with an Introduction by R. Grossmann. 1977 ISBN Pb 90-247-1926-7
5. W. Tatarkiewicz: *A History of Six Ideas.* An Essay in Aesthetics. Translated from Polish a.o. by C. Kasparek. 1980 ISBN 90-247-2233-0
6. H.W. Noonan: *Objects and Identity.* An Examination of the Relative Identity Thesis and Its Consequences. 1980 ISBN 90-247-2292-6
7. L. Crocker: *Positive Liberty.* An Essay in Normative Political Philosophy. 1980 ISBN 90-247-2291-8
8. F. Brentano: *The Theory of Categories.* Translated from German by R.M. Chisholm and N. Guterman. 1981 ISBN 90-247-2302-7
9. W. Marciszewski (ed.): *Dictionary of Logic* as Applied in the Study of Language. Concepts - Methods - Theories. 1981 ISBN 90-247-2123-7
10. I. Ruzsa: *Modal Logic with Descriptions.* 1981 ISBN 90-247-2473-2
11. P. Hoffman: *The Anatomy of Idealism.* Passivity and Activity in Kant, Hegel and Marx. 1982 ISBN 90-247-2708-1
12. M. S. Gram: *Direct Realism.* A Study of Perception. 1983 ISBN 90-247-2870-3
13. J.T.J. Srzednicki, V.F. Rickey and J. Czelakowski (eds.): *Leśniewski's Systems.* Ontology and Mereology. 1984 ISBN 90-247-2879-7
    For 'The Leśniewski Collection' *see also Volume 24.*
14. J. W. Smith: *Reductionism and Cultural Being.* A Philosophical Critique of Sociobiological Reductionism and Physicalist Scientific Unificationism. 1984 ISBN 90-247-2884-3
15. C. Zumbach: *The Transcendent Science.* Kant's Conception of Biological Methodology. 1984 ISBN 90-247-2904-1
16. M. A. Notturno: *Objectivity, Rationality and the Third Realm: Justification and the Grounds of Psychologism.* A Study of Frege and Popper. 1985 ISBN 90-247-2956-4

Volumes 1–8 previously published under the Series Title: Melbourne International Philosophy Series.

Nijhoff International Philosophy Series

17. İ. Dilman (ed.): *Philosophy and Life*. Essays on John Wisdom. 1984 ISBN 90-247-2996-3
18. J. J. Russell: *Analysis and Dialectic*. Studies in the Logic of Foundation Problems. 1984 ISBN 90-247-2990-4
19. G. Currie and A. Musgrave (eds.): *Popper and the Human Sciences*. 1985 ISBN Hb 90-247-2998-X; Pb 90-247-3141-0
20. C. D. Broad: *Ethics*. Lectures given at Cambridge during the Period 1933–34 to 1952–53. Edited by C. Lewy. 1985 ISBN 90-247-3088-0
21. D.A.J. Seargent: *Plurality and Continuity*. An Essay in G.F. Stout's Theory of Universals. 1985 ISBN 90-247-3185-2
22. J.E. Atwell: *Ends and Principles in Kant's Moral Thought*. 1986 ISBN 90-247-3167-4
23. J. Agassi, and I.C. Jarvie (eds.): *Rationality: The Critical View*. 1987 ISBN Hb 90-247-3275-1; Pb 90-247-3455-X
24. J.T.J. Srzednicki and Z. Stachniak: *S. Leśniewski's Lecture Notes in Logic*. 1988 ISBN 90-247-3416-9
    For 'The Leśniewski's Collection' *see also Volume 13*.
25. B.M. Taylor (ed.): *Michael Dummett*. Contributions to Philosophy. 1987 ISBN 90-247-3463-0
26. A. Z. Bar-On: *The Categories and the Principle of Coherence*. Whitehead's Theory of Categories in Historical Perspective. 1987 ISBN 90-247-3478-9
27. B. Dziemidok and P. McCormick (eds.): *On the Aesthetics of Roman Ingarden*. Interpretations and Assessments. 1989 ISBN 0-7923-0071-8
28. J.T.J. Srzednicki (ed.): *Stephan Körner – Philosophical Analysis and Reconstruction*. Contributions to Philosophy. 1987 ISBN 90-247-3543-2
29. F. Brentano: *On the Existence of God*. Lectures given at the Universities of Würzburg and Vienna (1868–1891). Edited and translated from German by Susan F. Krantz. 1987 ISBN 90-247-3538-6
30. Z. Augustynek: *Time. Past, Present, Future*. Essays dedicated to Henryk Mehlberg. 1991 ISBN 0-7923-0270-2
31. T. Pawlowski: *Aesthetic Values*. 1989 ISBN 0-7923-0418-7
32. M. Ruse (ed.): *What the Philosophy of Biology Is*. Essays dedicated to David Hull. 1989 ISBN 90–247–3778–8
33. J. Young: *Willing and Unwilling*. A Study in the Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer. 1987 ISBN 90-247-3556-4
34. T. Z. Lavine and V. Tejera (eds.): *History and Anti-History in Philosophy*. 1989 ISBN 0-7923-0455-1

Nijhoff International Philosophy Series

35. R.L. Epstein: *The Semantic Foundations of Logic.* Volume 1: Propositional Logics. With the assistance and collaboration of W.A. Carnielli, I.M.L. D'Ottaviano, S. Krajewski and R.D. Maddux. 1990 ISBN 0-7923-0622-8
36. A. Pavković (ed.): *Contemporary Yugoslav Philosophy.* The Analytic Approach. 1988 ISBN 90-247-3776-1
37. A. Winterbourne: *The Ideal and the Real.* An Outline of Kant's Theory of Space, Time and Mathematical Construction. 1988 ISBN 90-247-3774-5
38. K. Szaniawski (ed.): *The Vienna Circle and the Lvov-Warsaw School.* 1989 ISBN 90-247-3798-2
39. G. Priest: *In Contradiction.* A Study of the Transconsistent. 1987 ISBN 90-247-3630-7
40. J. Woleński (ed.): *Kotarbiński: Logic, Semantics and Ontology.* 1990 ISBN 0-7923-0865-4
41. P. Geach (ed.): *Logic and Ethics.* 1991 ISBN 0-7923-1044-6
42. U. Wybraniec-Skardowska: *Theory of Language Syntax.* Categorial Approach. 1991. ISBN 0-7923-1142-6
43. J. Bransen: *The Antinomy of Thought.* Maimomian Skepticism and the Relation between Thoughts and Objects. 1991 ISBN 0-7923-1383-6

Further information about our publications on *Philosophy* are available on request.

Kluwer Academic Publishers – Dordrecht / Boston / London

The Antinomy of Thought

Maimonian Skepticism and the Relation between Thoughts and Objects

In this book a case is made for an important voice we missed in the Kantian composition of our recent philosophical past: the voice of skepticism. It is introduced by means of an analysis of the work of an almost completely neglected early critic of Kant, Salomon Maimon (1752–1800).

It is argued that the work of Maimon provides powerful arguments for the claim that the structure of our articulations of the relation between thoughts and objects has an intrinsically aporetic character, that, in other words, we are confronted with an *Antinomy of Thought*. The point of such skeptical arguments is that a *theory* is the wrong thing to look for as regards the relation between thoughts and objects – an adequate account of this relation will have to take the form of a *problem*.

In order to show the actual importance of Maimonian skepticism it is argued that the failure of some contemporary American accounts of thought (those of Rosenberg, Rorty and Nagel) can be explained in terms of their ignorance of *The Antinomy of Thought*.

KLUWER ACADEMIC PUBLISHERS NIPS 43 ISBN 0-7923-1383-6